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FIFTH EDITION

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BY S. S. COHEN

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Bhagavan SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

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FOREWORD

I CONSIDER it a rare privilege accorded to me that I should be asked to write a prefatory note to a book on the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the great sage who is adorning the sacred hillside in Tiruvannamalai. In the dispensation of Providence, it was my good fortune to have had access to a sage, who shines in the spiritual firmament as a bright star, guiding the restless and depressed way-farer along the path towards the haven of true and lasting happiness.

Dazzled as the majority of mankind are by the phantoms of this illusory world, frantic are their efforts to clutch at them, under a false sense of satisfaction ; but they are ever tantalized in the fruition of their yearning : and late in their span of life, do they feel a pang of regret for having wasted their precious time in seeking after shadows oblivious of the reality. The life and example of this great saint serve as a beacon light to warn us about the pitfalls in the path of worldliness and guide us on the safe path of spirituality. His magnetic influence is a boon. One brief remark of his dispels sometimes a thick cloud of doubt, a heaving heart is soothed by a short sermon of his, and even the knotty conundrums of abstruse philosophy find satisfactory solution from his simple exposition, emerging forth from the fountain of his intuition.

Many respond to the clarion call of this living monument of spiritual glory but few are those who make a

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genuine attempt to realise what this sage has attained. His evolution is so far ahead of the average humanity of to-day, that he dwells in the transcendent sphere of spiritual consciousness, his physical body and senses being no impediment to the realization of his true inner self. To him, the illusion of the physical world is no longer a veil to hide the substratum of all phenomena. It has been a transparent medium for him. The mind, the arch-juggler, is to him a docile and faithful servant. His favourite sermon is "Retreat ever within thine own self; seek the source whence the restless mind spins out an unceasing web of thoughts; brush aside the springing thoughts; concentrate at the root of thought; and take repose in that stillness and quietude. So much is thy effort, and what next is one for experience and inner realisation, and does not admit of exposition in words." Few have reached this abode of bliss.

Another gem of spiritual truth which this holy sage places for our gaze is: "Happiness is really an inner attitude, or a subjective realization of the mind, though many are under a misapprehension that it depends upon external conditions only." The outer quest for happiness, he would say, will only be the game of "Hide and Seek." He used to say that by a wise adaptation of the attitude to changing events and environments, it is in our power to preserve a state of unruffled mentality. Much of the sorrow, misery, and depression, can be averted by the practice of such an adaptation, which is, of course, based on wise discrimination. Real happiness is one that does not depend upon anything external to one's self. It is unconditioned bliss and therefore permanent.

Know the "I". That is how he would ask us to tackle the problem of life. The words are simple, but

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their conception has baffled many a brilliant intellect. Here again, he would say, the mere intellectual disquisitions are hardly enough, but success lies in unflinching practice, with a sincere yearning for the attainment of the true purpose of life. Many a sceptic who scoffs at such great spiritual personages as visionary and unpractical would begin to doubt his own scepticism, if only he would visit this sage and remain within the ambit of his spiritual aura for an appreciable length of time.

I sincerely congratulate the author of this book, who has rendered a useful service to the present generation as also to posterity, by sparing no pains in gathering information about the incidents in the life of this holy sage and about his talks and sayings, which a limited number of disciples and admirers have had opportunities to hear, and by embodying them in the chapters of this book in the author's felicitous and lucid style, in a masterly way. It may not be out of place, if I should observe in this preface, that the author of this book happens to be my classmate and colleague at the Bar in my younger days and that the link of old friendship has again brought us together in connection with his book, dealing with the life and teachings of a great sage, whom we both adore.

(Sd.) K. SUNDARAM CHETTY,
High Court Judge,
Madras.

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CHAPTER I

WHO IS THIS ?

But what went ye out for to see ? A man clothed in soft raiment ? Behold they which are georgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in King's courts. But what went ye out for to see ? A prophet ? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.

TIRUVANNAMALAI is a small municipality in a corner of the North Arcot District. The people are quiet, and

> "Along the cool sequestered vale of life
> *They keep* the noiseless tenor of *their* way."

The temple and the hill of Arunachala, however, are sacred in the eyes of the Hindus throughout the Presidency—especially of the Saivites. The chief festival that attracts large crowds is the ten-days' festival in Kartikai (November—December). From the fifth day, a cattle fair is usually held and the roads are covered day and night by pilgrims thronging to see the temple, processions, decorations, fireworks, cattle-sales, etc. The crowds gather mostly in three places—at the temple, at the cattle fair, and at a garden near the Palitirtham. The former two require no explanation. But what is there in the third ? Let us peep in and see.

The garden is some forty yards north of the Chengam Road. A large sheet of water, coming almost to the road

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level, the Palitirtham tank flanks it on the west. A few cocoanut, plantain and mango trees form the front view and screen the interior from the road. Proceeding beyond these, we notice a few old thatched cottages and a new tiled structure at one end of a flower garden skirted by the babbling brook at the foot of the hill. What an imposing and inspiring background the hill forms for this forest hermitage! How gracefully does it slope down, in condescension, as it were, to meet the Asram, to blend and harmonise with its grove and tank, its thatch and flowers, to present the beauteous face of nature. On that face is writ large (what eyes free of earth-stain can clearly discern) : Calm, Peace, Perpetual Bliss, stretching where no eye can follow, into the very centre of the earth ; Lofty Height, ever soaring upward, onward, and heavenward pointing to (and bidding the awe-struck gazer's heart to arise, aspire and be lost in) the infinite expanse above. "What a lovely spot for quiet peaceful meditation, and ecstatic absorption!" a visitor remarks. Perhaps ; but just now, at the Kartikai festival, the scene is *not* quiet. A ceaseless stream of men, women and children is pouring in from the road, and proceeding towards the small southern cottage. What do these go to see? Or, in the words of Sankey :

"What means this eager, anxious throng,
Which moves with busy haste along,
These wondrous gatherings day by day,
What means this strange commotion pray?
In accents hushed the throng reply,"
The Swami's nigh ; to his feet we fly.

On yonder platform, upon a tiger-skin, sits a medium-sized Figure, past middle age, with fair though somewhat

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sun-browned complexion and unshaven head and face, naked except for a cod-piece (*Koupinam*).* He sits like a Roman philosopher's statue, serene and motionless, with a steady gaze, directed at nothing in particular. Hundreds sit, stand, or pass before him, gazing into his eyes all the while. Yet he winces not, winks not, turns not. What bright, glittering eyes are his! Do you examine them closely? What calm, what peace, and what unshaken firmness are there! What profound depths of meaning do they not draw you into! And if you still persevere, unawed and undismayed, what giddy heights of heaven do they not help you to soar to! If people tired of their earthly and spiritual wanderings do but look into them, what balmy influence, what silent bliss do they not shed! Truly, that which gleams through the face of Nature here shines also within those eyes. Is he but a forest hermit, or the Sylvan Spirit, the Genius of the wood and the hill?

In front of that Figure, a bamboo fencing is erected to keep off the rush; and large numbers are seated or standing in front, leaving a narrow strip, a yard wide between themselves and the fencing, for the stream of visitors to pass. The new-comers file through this strip and, as they approach that figure, fall prostrate and tender such presents (of cocoanut, plantains, flowers, raisins, candy, camphor, etc.) as they may have brought with them. The attendant within the fencing receives these offerings and returns a part of them as *Prasada* (a blessed gift). The visitor receives it with joy, bows and quickly departs round the cottage. No words are spoken by the

* Cod piece (Koupina) is a narrow strip of cloth tied vertically for the sake of decency, like a truss, to a horizontal strip of cloth running round the waist.

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visitors and none by that Figure. The entire sitting is gone through in solemn silence. This impressive levee goes on for several hours in the morning and is repeated in the afternoon and evening. "What a rush!" some newcomer exclaims, as he gladly extricates himself from the throng, or gets a peep through it at that Figure. He is then informed that even in other months crowds go and prostrate before him in this way, though only in tens or hundreds, and not in thousands as in Kartikai; that in those months he is quietly seated in the newly built northern hall, and many resort to him for, and quickly obtain relief from, their mental worries; that rich and poor, high and low, young and old, are all equally welcome and treated alike; and that he is free and kind to all.

Let us visit this town once again, say, on the night of the tenth day's festival—the "Krittika Deepam." At 6 p.m. the crowning event of that festival takes place. God Arunachala issues out of the temple in a palanquin. Immediately a huge *bonfire* blazes on the crest of the Hill, consuming maunds of ghee and camphor. This burns for many days and is visible for many miles around. Everywhere the pious devotee watches for it and instantly prostrates before it. For, is not this *bonfire* the visible presentation to all of the fact that the Hill represents one of the eight forms of God, the form of Fire or Light—whence the Hill is called "*Tejo Lingam*" (God in the form of light)? That light, ever visible to the hearts that thrill with faith, is vividly brought home by this fire, even to the poor in faith, the less imaginative souls. Let us get to the forest hermitage at Palitirtham, and see what happens there. In front of that southern cottage is a raised open platform: and on a bench there is seated

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the Figure we already saw. At his feet are rows of men, silent and prayerful watching for the first gleam of the bonfire. And when it appears the crowds here also fall down and worship God in the fire-crowned Hill. Instantly there is a blaze of camphor and ghee before this Figure, and all fall down and worship the inner and the outer light. Then commences a solemn chant by the devotees, —of a Tamil hymn *Aksharamana-malai*, in praise of God Arunachala as embodied in the Hill—with impassioned cries for realization of the Self, for absorption in Him. The devout listener's heart is stirred to its depths. This goes on for over an hour ; and the stillness of the night deepens the awe and reverence evoked by the chant.

The visitor's interest is now roused and he questions —Who is this ? How came he to be so deeply revered—nay, worshipped by so many ?

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CHAPTER II

A FAMILY TRAIT

"Oh yet, we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill."

Tennyson : In Memorium LIV.

TIRUCHUZHI is a small village some thirty miles off Madura and eighteen miles from Virudhunagar, the nearest railway station, and hence is not favoured by globe-trotters or busy politicians. The temple here is a well-built structure many centuries old and its Lord has been praised in classic Tamil song by Sundaramurthi and Manikkavachakar. It has long been the headquarters of a taluk in the Ramnad Setupati's Estate, and contains a few public offices.

Let us look back fifty years, and see Tiruchuzhi of 1879. A busy village or a quiet town, it might then be termed, with five hundred houses or more. Among these we look for that of Sundaram Ayyar, an uncertified pleader practising, mostly, before the local magistrate. He is busy in the mornings with his clients, of whom he has a good number. And he keeps an open house ; many clients with their friends and helpers have their board with him ; nay, " every stranger finds a ready chair " at his table. His spacious house of two apartments furnishes accommodation to newly arrived officers before they settle into suitable quarters. As he is very obliging by nature, his help

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ALAGAMMAL
(Bhagavan's Mother)

SUNDARAMIER
(Bhagavan's Father)

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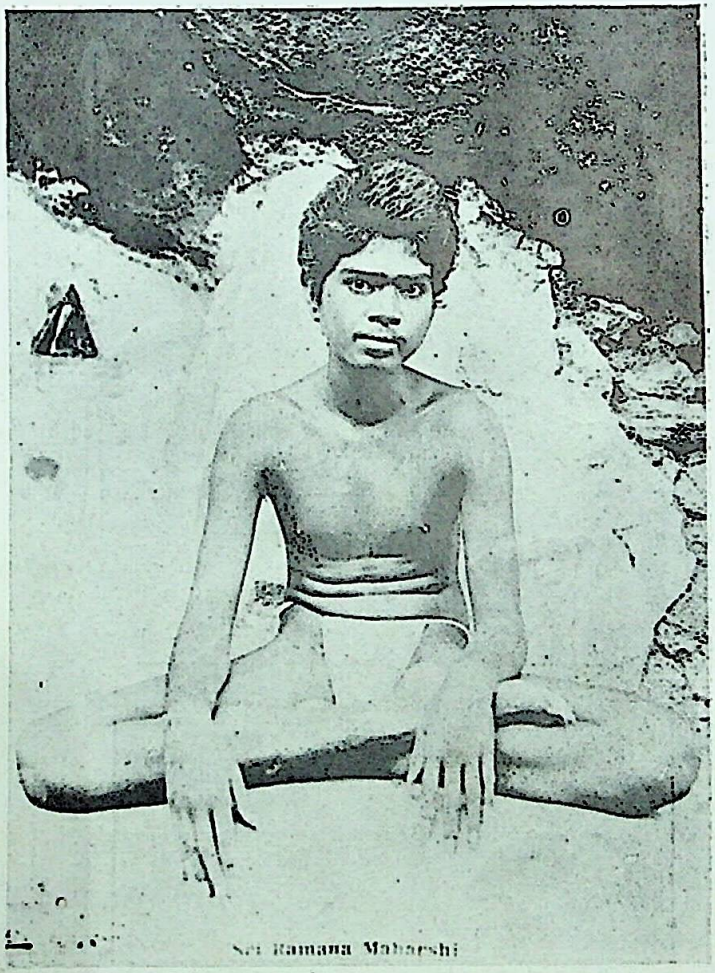

***Bhagavan* SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI**
(At the age of 21)

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is constantly sought and obtained by officers; and he is consequently a man of influence. Even criminal classes including highwaymen recognise his goodness and allow his cart to go unmolested. On the whole, for that village, he may be considered a well-to-do and important person.

We are not much interested in his wealth or position, however. Let us rather enquire about his character and attainments, especially in the field of religion, philosophy and spirituality. He was a self-made man who started life on a salary of rupees two per mensem as a village accountant's clerk in his twelfth year. He deserted that for the more chequered and enterprising life of a "petition writer," and ultimately obtained permission to practise as an uncertified pleader. We see him in the annexed picture and his character may well be gleaned from his lineaments therein. We see firmness or dogged determination, endurance, and careful and acute observation of men and things. It is these very qualities that probably contributed to his success in life, and also to that of his more famous son, the subject of this sketch.

As for spirituality, philosophic culture, or religious devotion, Sundaram Ayyar could not boast of any marked trait. He was just like any other prosperous pleader of the time. The priest at home regularly worshipped a set of tiny images and offered the daily food to them before it was served to the family. Occasional visits to the local temple and sermons, *Kalakshepams* or readings from the sacred legends and epics at home, were all that made up his religion. We note with interest, however, a peculiar feature in his family. One member in each generation gave up home and all comforts and turned ascetic. One

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of Sundaram Ayyar's paternal uncles had donned the orange or ochre coloured robe, seized the staff and water-pot and lived on begged food. Ayyar's elder brother also suddenly disappeared from the village, evidently intent on leading the life of an anchorite. Thus, for every generation the family had contributed an ascetic. There was an interesting anecdote narrated by the old folk about the origin of this family trait. An ascetic once came to the family and was not given due respect, not even a meal. He left them with a curse that in each generation, one member should turn ascetic and wander in quest of food. Whether this was a blessing or a curse, the sequel may show. Sundaram Ayyar had hardly an idea that any of his sons would renounce the world. At his death in 1892 he left three boys, Nagaswamy aged fourteen, Venkataraman aged twelve, and Nagasundaram aged six, none of whom showed the slightest variation from the usual run of worldly people. The question of interest to the public was, "Will the hoary 'curse' produce any one from this family who will not merely turn ascetic, but also render notable service to his fellowmen in the realms of religion and spirituality?"

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CHAPTER III

WHICH OF THE THREE ?

Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, the other left.

THE eldest son, Nagaswamy, was a fairly clever student on whom the family could well have built hopes of improving and advancing its economic interests. He was evidently expected to equip himself by the usual course of general education for a clerical appointment in Government Service with a big plum, a possible "deputy collectorship", looming at its distant end. The last, Nagasundaram, was too young for expectations to be formed or predictions hazarded about his future.

The second son, Venkataraman, seemed quite an unpromising lad. In the matter of study, he was indifferent, and, despite his natural shrewdness and keen intelligence, made but poor progress. Often going unprepared to the class, he would hear some other student repeating the day's lesson just once, and would instantly reproduce it from his memory, and forget it before the class was over—so little did he care for study! He seemed more interested in sports and games when he was taken out by his friends, and he would occasionally spend some hours with them in boxing, wrestling, swimming, round race, football or gymnastics. Consequently he had a well-developed physique; and boys of equal age and even

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older, would be in awe of him and behave towards him with due consideration. But all this was, in those days, counted as nothing to a boy's credit; and the family was apt to look upon him as a doubtful asset. So far we have taken the usual business point of view regarding the future of these lads. But there is the "curse" or family trait to consider.

Dares any of the three, live
To scorn the earth's delights and strife,
To dedicate to God his life,
To scale the spirit's steepest height,
To scatter thence serenest light,
And warmth on grateful men below,
That else may perish in the snow?

From this standpoint also, no prediction could be made about the third son. The eldest did not seem to have any such turn. The second son seemed to be still less likely "to scorn delights and live laborious days." His past, no doubt, gave a stray hint or two in this direction. He was born under very favourable auspices. At 1 A.M. on 30th December, 1879 (corresponding to Pramathi, Margali 16th), *i.e.*, on *Arudra Darsanam* day, when God Siva had just finished his night's procession through the streets and was about to re-enter the temple, this child was ushered into the world and uttered its first cries. That day is, to the Saivites, a specially holy day. It was on that day that God Nataraja (Siva), had deigned to appear before devout worshippers such as Gautama-muni, Vyaghrapada and Patanjali; and hence its celebration with much fervour. From early dawn the pious visit the sacred tanks, take their bath, and, after the customary observances proceed to the temple, secure *darsana*, *i.e.*, catch a glimpse of

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the sacred Image amidst huge crowds that pour in, hymn His praise for hours, and accompany the diurnal and nocturnal procession of Siva in village streets and take Him back to the temple at midnight. But if any augury was ventured from birth on such a day and at such an hour, Venkataraman's early years seemed disappointing. He was no better and no worse than any other boy; he would play his pranks on secular and sacred objects alike. Like his father, he drifted into a traditional regard for Saivite worship, whether at home or in the temple, and went through it without experiencing any special emotion. He was not given any training in the sacred language of the Vedas. He picked up his Three R's in the elementary classes at Tiruchuzhi, and spent a year in the first form at Dindigul. His middle school studies were prosecuted in the Scott's Middle School, Madura, and High School studies in the American Mission High School there, wherein he received the only religious instruction he had. But Hindu boys as a rule have an aversion to their Bible classes and pay little attention to the prayers or Bible teaching. Venkataraman cared little for his bread-winning general course, and less for the religious classes.

In fact, till almost the end of his schooldays, he cared at heart for nothing—not even for sports and games. Life had not revealed any purpose or motive strong enough to attract him.

As a result, till 1896, none of the sons of Sundaram Ayyar gave any hint of spiritual development; and it seemed as though the "curse", or the family trait, would operate, or appear if at all, only among their agnatic cousins.

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CHAPTER IV

GLIMPSES OF THE DAWN

"Coming events cast their shadows before."

IT is towards the end of 1895 that we notice the first rustle of leaves heralding the coming storm in Venkataraman's life. One day in November he met an elderly relation from Tiruchuzhi at Madura and accosted him with the usual question "Whence are you coming?" "From Arunachalam," was the dry matter-of-fact reply. But this simple answer acted like a magic spell on the hitherto listless youth. The term "Arunachalam" which he had been accustomed till then to hear without any emotion, suddenly thrilled him with awe and joy, filling his mind with lively ideas of omnipresence and holiness, supreme power and kindness—ideas which clustered round some dimly-perceived symbol encompassed by huge compound walls and high towers in some far-off wondrous land where every clod of earth or stone was sacred. In great surprise that some one should have actually seen and returned from such a holy place, the youth exclaimed with evident excitement—"What! From Arunachalam! Where is it?" It was the turn of the relation to be surprised; but he coolly remarked pitying youthful inexperience and ignorance—"What! Do you not know Tiruvannamalai? *That* is Arunachalam." The spark that had glowed for a moment in Venkataraman's breast seemed to

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be chilled by this reply; and he bestowed no further thought on Arunachalam for a long while.

But what means this agitation in a hitherto unruffled breast? Is it the smouldering of subterranean fire that will soon overflow and extinguish all trace of the past and turn the present and future into something new, something "rich and strange"? Or is it *only a gentle ripple* in his "subconscious" mind.....

> - - - "whose hoarding sense
> Gives out at times, he knows not whence,
> A little flash, a mystic hint."

that might still leave the trend of his life unaffected? Who knows?

It was about the same time—perhaps a few months later—that another interesting event happened in his life. He found at home a copy of *Periapuranam* which his uncle had borrowed. This was the first religious book that he went through apart from his class lessons and it interested him greatly. It gave him a novel experience—like the first reading of Arabian Nights to many a youth. It transported him to a different world, unlike the dry, uninteresting world he had been accustomed to. That book gives a moving account of the sudden accession of faith, deep love of God, utter self-sacrifice, and sublime communion with Him which marked the lives of the sixty-three Tamil saints. As he read on, surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession, thus paying a momentary homage to the grand ideals and ideas that had charmed the hearts

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and engaged the minds of his countrymen for centuries. But when the book had been quickly read through and laid aside, the new impulses and ideals disappeared leaving him exactly (it seemed) as he was before that study. The dull routine of his life was resumed, and he was plodding on with his sixth-form lessons and usual domestic duties until mid 1896. Was his life to be an arid waste that swallowed and parched up all seeds of good that fell into it ? Was it a tree that yielded an abundance of wood and branch, bark and leaf—but no flower or fruit ?

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CHAPTER V

BORN ANEW

"Ye must be born again."

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूंस्वाम् ॥

"This Atman is not to be attained by recitation of the Vedas, nor by keen intellect, nor by often hearing Scripture. He whom It chooses attains It. To him the Atman reveals Its form."—*Katha Upanishad.*

THE crisis of Venkataraman's life, the great awakening that converted his listless and dull life into one of lofty realisation and devotion to ideals, came about in the middle of the year 1896, when he was in his seventeenth year—the age at which the greatest number of religious persons have experienced their "conversion" or started a new life. Changes in one's ideals and nature are always hard for outsiders to follow—especially if they occur in an undemonstrative person always accustomed to self-repression and seldom expressing his thoughts and feelings. As Venkataraman belonged to this type and was a puzzle even to his friends and brothers, it is safest to describe the change in his own words. Long after this event, he was often queried by his devotees as to how he was

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transformed, and the following is substantially* what he himself said :

"It was about six weeks before I left Madura for good that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle's house. I was in my usual health. I seldom had any illness. I was a heavy sleeper. When I was at Dindigul in 1891 a huge crowd had gathered close to the room where I slept and tried to rouse me by shouting and knocking at the door, all in vain, and it was only by their getting into my room and giving me a violent shake that I was roused from my torpor. This heavy sleep was rather a proof of good health. I was also subject to fits of half-awake sleep at night. My wily playmates, afraid to trifle with me when I was awake, would go to me when I was asleep, rouse me, take me all round the playground, beat me, cuff me, sport with me, and bring me back to my bed —and all the while I would put up with everything with a meekness, humility, forgiveness, and passivity unknown to my waking state. When the morning broke I had no remembrance of the night's experiences. But these fits did not render me weaker or less fit for life, and were hardly to be considered a disease. So, on that day as I

* "Substantially."—The exact words have not been recorded. The Swami as a rule talks quite impersonally. There is seldom any clear or pronounced reference to 'I' or 'you' in what he says. The genius of Tamil is specially suited for such impersonal utterances, and he generally talks Tamil. However, one studying his words and ways discovers personal references, mostly veiled. His actual words may be found too colourless and hazy to suit or appeal to many readers, especially of the Western type. Hence the use here of the customary phraseology with its distinct personal reference.

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sat alone there was nothing wrong with my health. But a sudden and unmistakeable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die. Why I should have so felt cannot now be explained by anything felt in my body. Nor could I explain it to myself then. I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well grounded. I felt "I was going to die," and at once set about thinking out what I should do. I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there.

"The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective, or 'introverted'. I said to myself mentally, *i.e.*, without uttering the words—'Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.' I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though *rigor-mortis* had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together so that no sound might escape. Let not the word 'I' or any other word be uttered! 'Well then,' said I to myself 'this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am "I" dead? Is the body "I"? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound "I" within myself,—apart from the body. So 'I' am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit.' All this was not a mere intellectual process, but flashed before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, without any

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argument almost. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The 'I' or my 'self' was holding the focus of attention by a powerful fascination from that time forwards. Fear of death had vanished at once and forever. Absorption in the self has continued from that moment right up to this time. Other thoughts may come and go like the various notes of a musician, but the 'I' continues like the basic or fundamental *Sruti* note which accompanies and blends with all other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centred on 'I'. Previous to that crisis I had no clear perception of myself and was not consciously attracted to it. I had felt no direct perceptible interest in it, much less any permanent disposition to dwell upon it. The consequences of this new habit were soon noticed in my life.

"In the first place I lost any little interest I had in my outward relationship with friends, kinsmen or studies. I went through my studies mechanically. I would take up a book and keep the page open before me to satisfy my elders that I was reading. As for my attention, that was far away, gone far indeed from such superficial matters. In my dealings with relatives, friends, etc., I developed humility, meekness, and indifference. Formerly when among other boys I was given some burdensome task, I would occasionally complain of unjust distribution of work. If boys chaffed me, I might retort and sometimes threaten them, and assert myself. If someone dared to poke fun at me or take other liberties he would be made quickly to realise his mistake. Now all that was changed. All burdens imposed, all chaffing, and all fun were put

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up with meekly. The old personality that resented and asserted itself had disappeared. I stopped going out with friends for sports, etc., and preferred to be left to myself. Oftentimes I would sit alone by myself especially in a posture suitable for meditation, close my eyes and lose myself in the all-absorbing concentration on myself, on the spirit, current or force (*Avesam*) which constituted myself. I would continue it despite the constant jeers of my elder brother, who would mock me, address me by the titles *Jnani* (Sage), *Yogiswara* (Lord of Yogis) and advise me jocularly to go away to a dense primeval forest like the Rishis of yore. All preference and avoidance in the matter of food had gone. All food given to me, tasty or tasteless, good or rotten, I would swallow with indifference to its taste, smell or quality.

"One of the new features related to the temple of Meenakshisundareswara. Formerly I would go there rarely with friends, see the images, put on sacred ashes and sacred vermillion on the forehead and return home without any perceptible emotion. After the awakening into the new life, I would go almost every evening to the temple. I would go alone and stand before Siva, or Meenakshi or Nataraja or the sixty-three saints for long periods. I would feel waves of emotion overcoming me. The former hold (*Alambana*) on the body had been given up by my spirit, since it ceased to cherish the idea I-am-the-body (*Dehatmabuddhi*). The spirit therefore longed to have a fresh hold and hence the frequent visits to the temple and the overflow of the soul in profuse tears. This was God's (Iswara's) play with the individual spirit. I would stand before Iswara, the Controller of the universe and the destinies of all, the Omniscient and Omnipresent,

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and occasionally pray for the descent of his grace upon me so that my devotion might increase and become perpetual like that of the sixty-three saints. Mostly I would not pray at all, but let the deep within flow on and into the deep without. Tears would mark this overflow of the soul and not betoken any particular feeling of pleasure or pain. I was no pessimist. I knew nothing of life and had no idea that it was full of sorrow ; and I had no desire to avoid rebirth or seek release, to obtain dispassion (*Vairagya*) or salvation. I had read no books other than Periapuranam, my bible lessons and bits of Tayumanavar or Tevaram. My notion of God (or Iswara as I called the Infinite but Personal Deity) was similar to that found in the Puranas. I had not heard then of *Brahman, †Samsara, &c. I had no idea then that there was an essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything, and that myself and Iswara were both identical with it. At Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to Ribhugita and other works, I picked up these facts and discovered that these books were analysing and naming what I had previously felt intuitively without analysis and name. In the language of the books, I should describe my mental or spiritual condition after the awakening, as *Suddha Manas* or *Vijnana, i.e.,* the Intuition of the Illumined."

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*"Brahman" is God Impersonal, the One Real underlying all phenomena.

†"Samsara" is the endless succession of births and deaths.

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CHAPTER VI

CROSSING THE RUBICON

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune.
Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

यदहरेव विरजेत्तदहरेव प्रव्रजेत्

"The moment you feel life's vanity, quit home."

VENKATARAMAN has now hurled himself forward along the line of his choice. "Drink deep or taste not the Pierian Spring" was now his motto. He seldom lost an opportunity to shove his books and social duties aside, and sit up for his concentration on the self, *Atma-dhyana*. The social result of such conduct is not hard to imagine. Neglected lessons and neglected social duties bring on reprimands and punishments. An element of discord gradually develops and gains force enough to upset the original equilibrium. All progress, nay all motion, is the result of such want of adjustment between interior development and the environment. Venkataraman's uncle and brother bitterly deplored that such a fine intellect as his should be lost in what they believed to be useless religiosity or idle sentimentality, and administered many a reprimand. The school-master also could not put up with persistent disregard of class lessons, and finding exhortation useless resorted to the infliction of impositions. For his part, Venkataraman was getting to feel the unsuitability of his Madura home for the life he was intent on. It no doubt gave him physical comforts

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for which he did not care but hindered the one thing for which he cared. All things pointed to the coming of a crisis.

The crisis did arrive on Saturday the 29th August, 1896. He had failed to study English Grammar properly, and had been given an imposition to copy a lesson from Bain's Grammar three times. He sat upstairs for some time, and copied the lesson twice, and was writing the third copy. Suddenly his soul revolted against "the sad mechanic exercise." He bundled up Bain and his papers, cast them aside, and sat up bolt upright for his congenial meditation, with eyes closed. His brother was watching him all the while, and, with intent to make him mend his ways, cried out, "இப்படி யெல்லா மிருக்கிறவனுக்கு இதெல்லா மென்னத்துக்கு?" The words literally are: "Why should one, who behaves thus, retain all this?" His meaning was quite clear: why should one who preferred his unworldly meditation to his study and domestic and social duties, continue to stay in society and profess to go on with a course of study? Such expressions had been used several times during the previous four or five weeks by the senior, but they had not been taken serious notice of by the junior. This time, however, the shot went home. "Yes," thought young Venkataraman, "what my brother says is quite true. What business have I here any longer?" Immediately the thought of "Arunachala," that had given him a thrill in the previous November, came to the front, and took possession of his soul with a consuming desire to get away and be in "Arunachala." Is not Arunachala, the All-seeing, All-powerful and All-knowing, now calling him? Yes, this is the call of Arunachala, he decided, the call of his Father in Heaven.

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He cast about for ways and means to get out to Arunachala. That must be done secretly; and it must not be within the power of his relations to trace him and drag him back into the old groove. Once gone to Arunachala, he must be there for ever like the saint Nanda who said:

"தில்லை வெளியிலே கலந்துகொன் டாலவர்
திரும்பியும் வருவாரோ?"

(*i.e.* If one goes to Chidambaram and enters the Divine Ether will he ever return?) Venkataraman also felt that once he put his hand to the plough, once he got to the Feet of Arunachala, there should be no turning back. Come what may, he would face all, strong in the strength of the Lord. So he got up from his seat of meditation and told his brother that he should go to school that day at twelve noon, to attend a special class on electricity. The latter, quite unaware that he was giving his junior just the financial help needed for his trip to Tiruvannamalai, said: "Well then, do not fail to take five rupees from the box below, and to pay my college fees in the College near your school." Here was a fresh manifestation of help from the Unseen. He went down, bolted his meal, and received five rupees from his uncle's wife. He hastily turned over an antiquated atlas that did not disclose the Villupuram-Tiruvannamalai-Katpadi branch line opened in 1892. According to that atlas he noted that Tindivanam was the nearest point to Tiruvannamalai on the Madura-Egmore Railway line; and, surmising that three rupees would suffice to carry him to Tindivanam, he left the balance of Rs. 2 in an easily discoverable corner with a letter amidst his brother's books, and left Madura for good.

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CHAPTER VII

A WORD IN PARTING

How is it that ye sought me?
Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?
St. Luke II, 49.

THE parting letter runs thus :—

என் தகப்பனுரைத் தேடிக்கொண்டு
நான் ∧ அவருடைய உத்திரவின்படி இவ்விடத்தை விட்டுக் கிளம்பிவிட்டேன். இது நல்ல சாரியத்தில் தான் பிரவேசித்திருக்கிறது. ஆகையால் இந்தக் காரியத்திற்கு ஒருவரும் விசனப்படவேண்டாம். இதைப் பார்ப்பதற்காக பணமும் செலவு செய்யவேண்டாம்.

உன் சம்பளத்தை இன்னும் செலுத்தவில்லை. ரூ. 2 இதோடு கூட இருக்கிறது.

இப்படிக்கு,
— — — — —

in search of my father and

"I have, ∧ in obedience to his command, started from here. This is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over this affair. To trace this out, no money need be spent.

Your College fee has not yet been paid. Rupees two are enclosed herewith.

Thus,
— — — — —

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The letter throws clear light on the all-interesting question of Venkataraman's state of mind when he left Madura for good, and the progress that had been made by him in the ethical and spiritual fields. One would like to know whether he left Madura, casting "a longing lingering look behind," as thoughts of hearth and home, kith and kin, and friends and former scenes of joyous or other emotions passed before his mind's eye, and whether sympathetic sorrow welled up in his heart to think of the grief that would be caused to his mother and others in losing him. Had he also any fears or misgivings about the future, as he was going into the dark and unknown world, homeless, penniless and friendless ?

Strange to say, none of these thoughts appear to have distressed him. A huge wave of frenzy seems to have swallowed up his entire being and left little room for thoughts like these. He was, however, too good-natured and too loving a soul entirely to ignore the feelings of those dear to him. He wished to see them freed from all the worries of a search for him, and from the deep distress which would be caused by his absence—especially to his mother. He consoles their distress by a reference to the goodness of his enterprise, and bids them cheer up. He seems to say :—

"Arunachal, from afar
Is calling. That's the call for me.
May there be no moaning at the bar,
When I put out to sea."

As to their fears about him and his future, he informs them that he would be in safe hands, as he is starting

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purely in obedience to the Father's command, in order to seek and find Him. He has further a desire to save the family needless expense in trying to find his whereabouts. He also wishes to inform his brother that his college fees remained unpaid, and that part of it (namely rupees two) has been left with the letter. All this is one side of the shield ; the other side is spiritual. Here we note that the chief feature in Venkataraman's development is his powerful faith in *Iswara* (God, the Father), "Arunachala," who was calling him. The omission of this name must be the result of the conscious or unconscious perception that it would betray his destination. The next feature revealed by the letter may be regarded by some as its most important feature and perhaps as the only one worth mentioning. Even the most casual reader would note the use of the term இது "This" in the letter. The opening sentence blurts out an "I". The individual consciousness is then to the fore and clearly noticed by the reader. But in the very next sentence, the philosopher's stone touches and transmutes the baser metal (the individual ego) before the reader's eyes into the gold of an impersonal or expanded "I". The next phrase after "I" in the letter is என் தகப்பனார் ("My father"). Here leaps the blest ego on to Heaven, asserting a son's right to visit the Father. The baseness of the ego is immediately lost, and the survivor is the "Son of God." He is like his Father, a spirit, and not a "cunning cast of clay." The removal of *Dehatma buddhi* (the idea "I am the body"), this disappearance of the earth-stain from the writer, furnishes the clue to the otherwise puzzling term இது "this" in the following sentences. Reference is made by the enlightened soul of the writer in the second sentence, to the journey to Tiruvannamalai ; and in describing himself,

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the third person neuter is employed. Not "I", but "this" is what launches on the enterprise. What leaves Madura for Tiruvannamalai now (*i.e.*, from the second sentence onwards) is not the spirit, that is already getting absorbed in God, but the body, viewed clearly as distinct from the spirit. The identification of one's self with the body has snapped; and the broken ends are clearly exposed to view. The next sentence refers to "this" business and not to my business. The fourth sentence also refers to the probable search by relations for the missing writer in these terms: "இதைப் பார்ப்பதற்காக" "to trace this (person)." The letter seems here to chide the relations thus:—'Tush! you want to see "*this*" *body*, "this" inert matter! "What good will that do? You really wish to have commerce with the embodied spirit you knew under the name of Venkataraman. Behold! That spirit is gone. A new spirit, very hard to identify with the old narrow, body-bound one, has taken its place. Hence cease your quest." Then comes the letter to a close with a "Thus ————." Here, in place of the dashes, a signature would have been appended by Venkataraman of earlier years. But on this occasion, the personality which began with an "I" had melted into "this" in the succeeding lines, and at the close there was evidently no person remaining at that time and at that place to sign the letter. The sense of personality had sunk, vanished, or at any rate got too much attenuated to warrant a signature or produce an inclination to sign the letter. The omission of a signature is clearly not due to lack of time in the hurry to catch the train. There has been time to inscribe a series of dashes in lieu of the signature, and thereafter to add even a postscript, to inform the brother about his unpaid college fee, and the balance of money

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left. Even these later lines are all impersonal. "Your college fee has not been paid", says the postscript, but does not add *by whom*. There is no such phrase as "*by me*" or "*by this*". And lastly about the two rupees left, reference is made to the inert silver lying with the letter. It is purely impersonal. How eloquent are these indications of the alteration in his personality!

A great deal more has to be mentioned about the ethical or spiritual state of the subject of this sketch. In fact his biography has very little of "plot interest" or thread of facts on which his teachings and spiritual experiences are to be strung. Let us therefore have this plain dish of facts first, before we proceed to the rich dainties of his spiritual life.

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CHAPTER VIII

FLIGHT FROM HOME IN QUEST OF HIS FATHER

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

THE pilgrim had left home, determined never to set foot there again. The cuckoo leaves the crow's nest where she was hatched when she discovers its true nature, and never returns.

It was about twelve noon on Saturday when Venkataraman left home. The station was a mile off and he walked fast. Twelve noon was the usual time for the departure of the train to Tindivanam and Madras. But when he reached the station he found that, though he was very late, the train was still later. It had not yet arrived. Here was yet another proof that Providence (his Father) smiled on the enterprise. He looked up the fare to Tindivanam in the suspended tables at the station and found it to be Rupees two and annas thirteen. He was too much preoccupied with his thoughts to look a few lines below and see that Tiruvannamalai itself was a railway station, and that the fare to it was just three rupees. Not only was he shy and unaccustomed to ask people for information, but he was also swayed by a consideration of the secrecy needed for the success of his enterprise. Above

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all he was quite indifferent to the business skill which carefully settles the details of a tour programme so as to avoid needless trouble and expense. His soul was soaring on the other hand "about empyreal heights of thought," and kept company with the Lord. So he straightway bought a ticket to Tindivanam and, tying up the balance of annas three into a knot in a corner of his cloth, he got into a carriage as soon as the train arrived, and lost himself in his thoughts. He had no burden, physical or mental, to be anxious about. A man that thinks of various external things loses his soul, which gets swallowed up in thoughts of these objective possessions. For, where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Venkataraman's fellow passengers had their luggage, and had to keep a sharp lookout and should "beware of railway thieves" as the placards warned. His treasures were laid up (if at all) "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal." He was absorbed in thoughts of his Father and in repeatedly plunging within his own soul. It is of such that God (Sri Krishna) says in the Bhagavad Gita, (IX, 22),

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तोमां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

"I look after the interests and safety of those who are perpetually engaged in My service and whose thoughts are always on Me and Me alone."

Venkataraman had all the security and happiness which the absence of any sense of possession and the presence of God in the soul could give. Without noticing what his fellow passengers were saying or doing, and

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unmindful of the varied and beautiful landscape that was exposed to view as the train sped northwards he sank into himself and was silent. Several stations had thus been passed. In his carriage an old Moulavi* with a silvery beard was discoursing with other passengers on the life and teachings of many a saint. The Moulavi noticed the Brahman youth seated by himself and not partaking in their discussion, and asked him :

"Whither are you going, Swami ?"

"To Tiruvannamalai," was the laconic reply.

"I am also going there," said the Moulavi.

"What ? To Tiruvannamalai ?" queried the youth.

"No, I am going to the next station."

"What is the next station ?" again asked the youth.

"Tirukoilur" was the Moulavi's reply.

"What ! Does the train go to Tiruvannamalai ?" asked the innocent youth in surprise.

"A strange passenger you are to be sure. Then to what place did you buy your ticket ?"

"To Tindivanam."

"O dear, you need not go to Tindivanam at all. We must alight at Villupuram Junction and change train for Tiruvannamalai and Tirukoilur."

After picking up this piece of information Venkataraman again sank back into himself, caring no more what became of his fellow passengers or aught else in the world. The excitement of his journey and his deep mental absorption kept off even the sensation of hunger. It was

* "Moulavi" means Mahomedan well-versed in religious lore.

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only when the train reached Trichinopoly Junction at sunset that he felt its pinch. He purchased two country pears and ate one of them. Hardly had he swallowed a morsel of the fruit when straightway his hunger disappeared, and he had a sense of fullness in the stomach, a disinclination to eat any more. This was a surprise to him. Till the previous day he was eating his two full meals a day, besides cold rice in the morning, and tiffin (i.e., lunch) in the afternoon, without any difficulty ; yet now a single morsel filled his stomach and he could eat no more ! As for sleep, he hardly knew the difference between sleep and the *Samadhi* state in which he was sunk all along. At 3 a.m. he reached Villupuram and alighted. In the morning he walked up and down the streets of Villupuram to discover which road to take. He was too shy to ask any one. He found on the finger-posts names like " Mambalapattu ", but not the name Tiruvannamalai. He did not know then that Mambalapattu was on the way to Tiruvannamalai. This brisk morning-walk made him hungry, and he went up to a hotel for food. The proprietor asked him to wait till noon for his meal. Venkataraman sat there and as usual lost himself in *Samadhi*. The hotel-keeper must have watched with interest this young Brahmin lad with a fair complexion, long jet-black locks, golden ear-rings, and a face beaming with intelligence, rapt in *Samadhi*, and having no luggage or possessions. When after meal, annas two were offered by the youth, the proprietor asked him :

" How much have you ? "

" Only annas two and a half," replied Venkataraman.

" Keep it yourself," said the proprietor.

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Venkataraman started at once for the railway station where he purchased a ticket to Mambalapattu, i.e., as far as the funds in hand permitted. He reached that station the same evening and resolved to walk the remaining distance to Tiruvannamalai. So he walked on about ten miles, and then saw a hill and a temple—the temple of Arayani-Nallur. He was totally unaccustomed to take such a long walk, especially under a hot sun. He felt quite wearied and it was late in the evening when he reached the temple. There was no one there. So he waited outside the front tower, and after some time, when the door of the temple was opened, entered and took his seat in a pillared hall (*a mantapam*), which was the only portion in that temple that was not altogether dark, and fell into meditation. Here as he sat he had a "visual automatism" or "photism"*—a vision of dazzling light suddenly streaming forth and pervading the place. He started from his seat, thinking "this must be the appearance of the God here," and went into the inner sanctuary (*Garba-Griha*) to see if it emanated from there. But, finding no such light in that room, he was convinced that what he saw did not come from the image. Whatever the light was it had disappeared at once, and he plunged in thought again. This *samadhi* was broken only by the cook shouting out after puja was over, "Who is there in the hall? Come out. I must lock the temple." Venkataraman came out and asked for some food. "There is no food for you here" was the curt reply. "Let me at least stay here," was the youth's request. "Oh no," said the priest, "no one is allowed to stay here."

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* See W. James' "*Varieties of Religious Experience*", p. 258.

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Venkataraman then came out and accompanied the others to Kilur, a distance of six furlongs, as he was told that perhaps there, after the night's puja was over, he might get food. When the party entered the Kilur temple of Viratteswara and the priest went on with his worship, Venkataraman fell again into *Samadhi,* from which he was roused by the priest at the time of his departure. The youth asked for food and received again the priest's curt negative reply. The temple drummer who had all along been present and observed the pious and saintly lad's plight, cried out: "Why, sir, give him my share." With this plate of boiled rice, Venkataraman was led to a Sastri's house in the neighbourhood at about 9 p.m. to get some water. But even as he waited he fell asleep; and he seems to have walked on during that sleep and fallen down on account of his hunger and weariness. Some time later he woke up to find himself lying some distance from where he originally stood. There was a crowd around him, wondering at the strange but handsome lad who had asked for water, fallen down, luckily without injury, and lost consciousness. He then picked up the rice which he found scattered on the floor, ate a portion of it, and slept there.

Next morning was Monday the 31st of August, 1896, *Gokulashtami,* the birth-day of Sri Krishna. He had still twenty miles to reach Tiruvannamalai; walking up and down he could not discover which road or path he was to take. He felt fatigued and hungry. So he must first find food, and then must go by train; "and for the train fare . . . . ", he mused awhile, and pulled off his ear-rings set with rubies. These, worth about twenty rupees, must be pledged. "How and to whom?" He had no

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experience of pledging and borrowing. Necessity is however the mother of invention. Hunger was asserting itself. So he walked on to the house of one Muthukrishna Bhagavatar and begged for food. He was referred to a dame in the house. The good lady rejoiced to see the youth arrive as a guest on this sacred day of Sri Krishna's birth, and gave him a copious cold meal, and insisted on his eating the whole of it, despite his feeling satiated after the very first mouthful. Then he went to the Bhagavatar, and, to avoid rousing undue suspicion, professed to have travelled with his luggage which somehow got lost on the way and to be reduced thus to the necessity of pledging his ear-rings to get funds, Rs. 4-0-0, to continue his pilgrimage. The Bhagavatar took the ear-rings and, finding them real gold and real rubies, advanced the four rupees after getting his address noted on a slip and giving him a slip with his own address in return.

The Bhagavatar and the dame, fully believing the scriptural declaration that all guests are God (Vasudeva) Himself, gave the youth not merely a full meal at noon but also a packet of sweetmeats prepared for Sri Krishna, even before they were duly offered as *Naivedya* (*i.e.*, food offering) at the formal puja, and sent him off to the railway station. Venkataraman promised to come back and redeem the jewels. But as soon as he left the house, he tore the address slip to pieces. He scorned the idea of reclaiming the jewels, whatever their value might be. With the sweetmeats and the money he marched to the station where he slept. On the morning of the 1st September, 1896, he got a ticket for four annas and reached Tiruvannamalai in an hour.

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CHAPTER IX

AT THE FATHER'S FEET

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee,
Now, rest my long divided heart,
Fixed on this blissful centre rest,
Nor ever from thy Lord depart,
With Him of every good possessed.

Sankey's Songs and Solos.

ALIGHTING at Tiruvannamalai station on the morning of 1st September, 1896, Venkataraman beheld his "promised land" in the "starry-pointing" towers of Arunachaleswara's Temple from afar. As with the Saint Nanda, the very sight of the towers filled his soul with joy, arising not merely from the sense of achievement but also from the close proximity to Bliss itself. With quick steps and a bounding heart he proceeded straight to the great Temple. The gates of the three high compound walls and all the inner doors were open. There was not a soul beside him there; and it looked as though the Father was thus preparing to welcome his "beloved son," who marched straight to the inmost shrine, the Holy of Holies, without any hindrance and addressed Arunachaleswara (in the shape of a Lingam) thus:

O God, obedient to Thy call,
Here have I come, deserting all.

That moment, all physical and mental excitement disappeared; he felt a soothing sensation and his cup of bliss was full to the brim.

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ARUNACHALA HILL.

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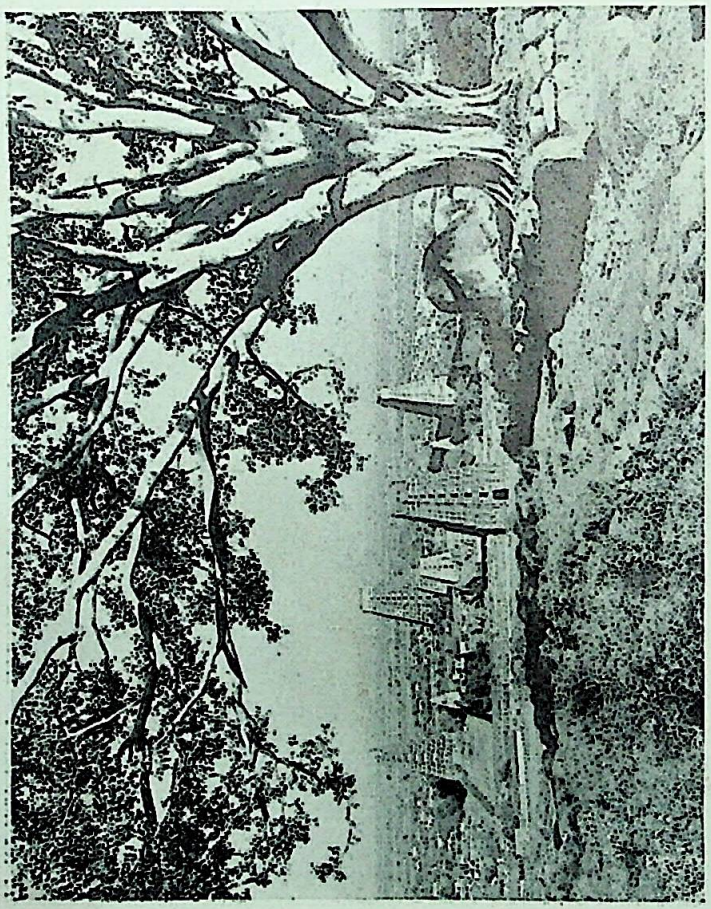

ARUNACHALA TEMPLE VIEW FROM THE HILL

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"Tis done, the great transaction's done.
I am the Lord's, and He is mine;
He drew me and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine."—(*Sankey*)

That was the supreme moment of his life, the point at which the old and false worldly life may be said to be "rung out", and the new and true life in the Father and the Self "rung in." He stood a while there in ecstasy, and left the sanctuary. He had sealed his future and delivered it over to God; and henceforward he was but a baby in the arms of his Father, to be tossed about or played with, as He chose.

"Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture burst on his sight.
Perfect submission, all is at rest.
He rests in the Lord, e'er happy and blest."—(*Ibid*)

Now that he had seen the stone Lingam, he felt that it was not any mere external physical object, but the Omnipresent, All-pervading Spirit, that had drawn him and was still drawing him away from his old groove. Three years passed before he again went in to see Arunachala in that temple. Constant visits to the shrine, he felt, were needless in the face of the constant presence that filled his heart, of the hourly protection that he received, and of the strengthening realization that he was the immortal spirit.

The lives of saints constantly pass from the personal to the impersonal, and *vice versa*: moments of passive characterless consciousness alternate with deep devotion to a Personal God. The youth felt this truth and other aspects of truth in a hazy undefined way, for till then he had no book-learning, nor a teacher to analyse for him

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all he felt, to show him for instance that the finite proves, on analysis, to be the infinite; the Personal, to be the Impersonal; the many with forms and attributes, to be the Absolute Real.

When Venkataraman (or the young Swami as we may henceforth call him) left his Father's presence, where did he go?

> "The world was all before *him* where to choose
> *His* place of rest; and Providence his guide."

His choice was his Father's immediate presence, that is, the premises of the great temple. According to Scriptures (*Sastras*), the proper residence for an anchorite (*Parivrajaka*) is a temple, a hill, a cave, the foot of a tree or the banks of holy waters; and the young Swami found the temple (as many others before and after him found) to be the most convenient. The very atmosphere there is pure and laden with spiritual power. The constant peals of the temple bells, the frequent streams of pious visitors approaching their God with *Tevaram*, *Tiruppugazh* and other hymns, the processions of the sacred images followed by a band of youths chanting the sacred Vedas with the very accent and intonation which the *rishis*, the seers of the forest, employed thousands of years ago, and many other phases of religious life that one constantly meets in these precincts, fully justified the selection so far as impulses to virtue and piety were concerned. If however one wished to get away even from external contacts and to commune in solitude with himself or his God, even then the precincts were particularly suited to his needs. There were the flower garden, the plantain garden, the higher chambers of the numerous towers, especially the skyscraping eastern one of thirteen

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storeys,* and many a nook and corner of this vast temple measuring over two furlongs in length and one in breadth and the numerous minor shrines therein ; all these provide adequate solitude. The ascetic has no need for secrecy and he has nothing to keep or lock up. Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of God hath no place to call his own. Every place is his ; the earth's surface everywhere is his bed ; the trees are his umbrellas, the moon his lantern ; and all the folk he meets are his brothers and sisters, father and mother providing him with food. Was the young Swami ever troubled by the thought where he was to get a meal ? Never ! Never has he troubled himself to think what he should drink, what he should eat, and wherewithal he should be clothed. His Father knows his need of these things ; and he thinks only of his Father and his self (which is the kingdom of God) and all these are added unto him. The thousand-pillared hall served as the first residence for the young "Brahmana Swami,"—which is the name by which he has always been known to the masses at Tiruvannamalai. He sat there during his period of *samadhi* without so much as a cloth, much less a mat, rug, or shawl to spread on the cold slabs ; his arm was his pillow ; his palm was his plate ; and any rag found by the way-side was his dress.†

* The eastern tower is 216 feet high ; the length of the temple is 1,480 feet and its breadth 680 feet.

† (१) सत्यां क्षितौ किं कशिपोः प्रयासैर्वाहौ
स्वसिद्धे ह्युपबर्हणैः किम् ।
सत्यंजलौ किं पुरुधान्नपात्रैर्दिग्वल्कलादौ सति किं दुकूलैः ।
(२) चीराणि किं पथिनसन्ति दिशन्ति भिक्षां नैवाङ्घ्रिपाः
परभृतस्सरितो प्यशुष्यन् ।

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On the very day of his arrival, he had aimlessly walked on to the Ayyankulam Tank and thrown away the bundle of sweetmeats given to him at the Kilur Bhagavatar's house, saying to himself, "To this block (*i.e.*, the body) why give any sweetmeats?" As he walked back from the tank and came near the temple some one accosted him and asked, "You want your tuft of hair to be removed, eh?" "Yes," replied the young Swami, who was immediately taken to a barber and had the entire hair on his head removed.

As a boy at Dindigul and Madura he was noted for the beauty of his hair (fine, long, jet-black locks), a fair complexion, and a handsome face; and now at one stroke he parted with this without a sigh. A clean-shaven head was the token of asceticism (Sanyasa), *i.e.*, of his parting with all the vanities of the world, and entering upon a solemn course of life in which things far higher, far more serious, should occupy every minute of his attention. He then tore his cloth to shreds, and, wearing one of them as a cod-piece (*Koupina*), he cast away the rest

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रुद्धा गुहाः किमवधूतसुहृन्न कृष्णः कस्माद्भजन्ति कवयो धनदुर्मदान्धान् ॥

(1) When there is the earth to lie upon, why trouble about a bed? When one's arm is readily available, why require pillows? When there is the palm of one's hand, why seek for plates and utensils? When there is the atmosphere or a bark or other similar stuff to clothe oneself in, what need is there of silks?

(2) Are there no rags by the way side? Do not trees yield their gifts? Have streams, that always support others, dried up? Is not God (Sri Krishna) the friend of those who have surrendered everything? Why then do the Wise wait upon the rich, who are blinded by and intoxicated with their wealth?

SRIMAD BHAGAVATA II. 2.

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and all his money, *i.e.*, three rupees and a half. He also removed his sacred thread from his body and threw it away. He was not going to touch, and never after did touch money. These vows of austerity, of "holy poverty," were essential details of the good path he had chosen, and they served to set off and support his high *tapas*. The wearing of the cod-piece was not merely for decency : it typified and served as a reminder of the internal fastening of the will, the vow of celibacy, of purity in thought, word and deed, the sublime vow, not even to *think* of sex ; for, as the great reformer and spiritualiser of Judaism showed, lust in the heart is quite as ruinous to spiritual flights as lust in speech or act.

The casting away of the sacred thread had its solemn significance. The young Swami realised his own nature, and discarded all that was not the self. The body was not himself : he had effectively discarded it by realising himself as the current or energy (*Avesam*) ; and as the body was thus discarded, with it must go all distinctions and ideas based upon the notion that the body was the self. A boy if asked suddenly, "Who are you ?", says "I am a Brahmin, I am a Hindu, I am the son of Ramaswami Iyer, I am a sixth form student, etc." His real self never occurs to him. The young Swami, who was determined to live in the Real, wished to cast away even the last vestige of distinction based on the body. The sacred thread reminded him of his Brahmin descent, Brahmin breeding, and the superiority connected therewith. He was getting farther and farther away from such distinctions. He was inferior to none, superior to none. The sacred thread had done its duty so far ; it had no further function to fulfil and was therefore cast

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away. "Love of wealth is the root of all evil;" so the Swami threw away what wealth he had in the shape of coins and clothes. He who feeds the raven and the sparrow, He who clothes the lilies of the field, was feeding and clothing him. Instinctively, that is, without any internal struggle or effort the young Swami reached these truths and denuded himself of everything that he could. After his shave he did not bathe, but addressed his body thus (mentally)—"Should this block be accorded the comforts of a bath?" and passed on towards the temple. However, on the way a heavy downpour of rain suddenly fell, soaking him from head to foot. So what he had thought to deny himself was granted with interest by the Divine Protector at Whose shrine he was going to worship.

The few weeks of his stay at this mantapam were not all rosy and pleasant. One may feel quite sure that the young Swami would have at least his share of thorns and pin-pricks to endure. A young man of seventeen, without any kinsmen or supporters, moving up and down, observing a rule of silence, provoked first the curiosity and next the mischievous tendency of those about him, especially of the youth. They had seen already for four or five years one Seshadri (later known as the famous Seshadriswami) walking up and down the streets of Tiruvannamalai, had called him a crazy fellow, and treated him as though he were mad. The new arrival, they thought, was a bird of the same feather and accordingly called him "Chinna Seshadri" (*i.e.*, Seshadri the Younger) and paid him the compliment of flinging a few stones at him as he sat in meditation. One day when the young Swami sat on the central dais of that mantapam plunged in meditation, he found stones whizzing from behind and

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front. Luckily they did not touch his body. So he moved to the dark recess of a large pit (known as Patala Lingam) in that same hall, where he hoped to be free from such attentions. The change however proved to be from the frying pan into the fire. That dark pit despite the sacred images in it, was never lit, never swept and never cleaned. It was damp and insect pests flourished luxuriantly in it. As the young *Mouni** sat there, enjoying the bliss of his soul, scorpions, ants, mosquitoes, and other vermin, the rightful occupants of the pit, attached themselves to the intruder's body and rejoiced in drinking his blood. The nether side of his thighs and legs as he sat there, were full of sores from which blood and pus issued. The fact that he was completely unconscious of this only goes to prove the depth of his absorption in the Infinite. When one Ratnammal went into this pit to give him food, pointed out these disadvantages and invited him to her house, the Swami gave no response by act, word or even gesture ; and when she left a newly washed cloth, requesting him to use it as a bed or a seat at least, to ward off the attack of these pests, he never cared even to touch it. Such was the intensity of his trance that he noticed nothing. As for the kind attentions of mischievous youths, the Swami did not entirely escape them. Afraid of the darkness, they stood afar and hurled broken pots, which fell into the pit and were scattered to pieces with a loud crash. Even the throwing of stones did not cease. Seshadri Swami mounted guard over this young Swami at times. But unfortunately his presence, on some occasions at any rate, increased the risk and not the comforts, of the ward. One Venkatachala Mudali describes such an occasion which led to a change in the Swami's resi-

* The silent one.

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dence thus : one noon, going near the thousand-pillared hall, Mudali found a group of boys, mostly Moslems, hurling stones in the direction of the pit. Enraged at the sight he ran, seized a twig, and was at the young scamps who fled away promptly. Suddenly from the dark recesses of the hall there issued forth the figure of Seshadri. Mudali was taken aback, but soon recovering himself, enquired of the Swami if the stones pelted by the boys had hurt him. "Oh no," replied the Swami, "but go and see the Chinnaswami there," pointed towards the pit, and went away. Proceeding further inside, Mudali could make out nothing for awhile, as he was coming from the glare into the darkness. In a few minutes, the faint outlines of a young face became discernible in that pit. Somewhat frightened, he went out to the adjoining flower-garden where a sadhu was working with his disciples. Mentioning the facts to them he took some of them with him. Even then the youthful figure sat motionless and with closed eyes, despite the noise of the footsteps of this group. Then they lifted the Swami from the pit, carried him from the hall up a flight of steps and deposited him in front of a shrine of Subrahmanya. The Swami still remained unconscious, his eyes closed ; evidently he was in deep *Samadhi*. They noted the large number of sores on the nether side of his thighs and legs, with blood and pus flowing from some of them, and wondered how any one could remain unconscious of his body amidst such torture. Regarding it as irreverence, nay impertinence, to make any further noise in such presence, they bowed and went away.

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CHAPTER X

YEARS OF STRENUOUS LIFE

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight:
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.
Ladder of St. Augustine. Longfellow.

'BRAHMANA SWAMI' himself a *mouni* (*i.e.*, one maintaining silence) was looked after* by the 'Mouna Swami,' who lived in the shrine of Subrahmanya and by a group of mendicant *sadhus* who lived in the adjoining garden. Some others also occasionally assumed care of him. But not one of these was attached to him permanently. 'Mouna Swami' used to give him the milk which was washed out from the Goddess Uma's shrine. This was a curious mixture of milk, water, turmeric powder, sugar, plantains (raw or ripe) and sundry other articles; and the passionless Brahmana Swami would gulp it down without any revulsion.

The temple priest, who noticed it one day, was greatly pained, and ordered that the pure milk used for

* That Brahmana Swami needed looking after would appear sufficiently clear from Venkatachala Mudali's account given in the previous chapter. A further proof of it may be cited here. The Swami was so rapt in his moods and would sit absorbed for so many hours (even eight or ten hours) at a stretch without rising for a meal, that food had sometimes to be thrust into his mouth and for about a month at the end of 1896, he was totally without any drapery—not even his usual cod-piece.

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the Goddess and immediately collected without any admixture, should thenceforward be sent daily through the Mouna Swami in order that he might give part of it to 'Brahmana Swami.' After a short stay of one or two months in the above shrine the Swami took up his residence in the adjoining flower garden. Here, under the oleander (*Alari*) plants, several of them ten or twelve feet high, he would sit absorbed in deep *samadhi*, and sometimes discover at the end of it that he was under a totally different plant many yards off from where he had first sat. He next removed himself to the hall wherein the vehicles of the sacred images are kept. Here the sport of the mischievous lads compelled him to retreat far into the interior between the wheels of a vehicle in the deep darkness, and lose himself in *samadhi*. Sometimes he would wake up to find his body underneath another vehicle, having somehow crossed many obstacles without injury. From this hall he moved on to the foot of a bel tree, then to the foot of an *illuppai* tree, and finally, to the *Mangai Pillayar* temple. The *iluppai* tree was quite close to a regular road within the first enclosure intended for processions within the temple. The Swami had already attracted the attention of the local public and of the pilgrims in the Kartikai season, November-December, 1896; and hence crowds were constantly flocking to see him. It was here that the first "disciple"* or permanent attendant on the Swami, Uddandi Nayinar came to him. This Nayinar was a pious

* The term 'disciple' should not be understood to imply a formal initiation ('*Diksha*'). Brahmana Swami appears never to have formally given '*Diksha*' or initiation to any one, or undertaken the position of a '*Guru*'. He instructed many people who went to him; and these claim to be his "disciples". The Swami himself had no Guru and no *Diksha* or initiation.

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scholar who had read sacred books of philosophy, but had found no peace of mind therein, and attained no realisation. He chanced to see the young Swami at the foot of the *iluppai* tree, rapt in ecstasy, evidently oblivious of his body. "Here indeed," said Nayinar to himself, "are realisation and peace, and here must I seek them." Thenceforward he was constantly at the Swami's side, looking after his bodily needs reciting *Vasishtham* and *Kaivalya Navanitam** and waiting with eager expectation to hear from his lips some blessed words of Upadesa (instruction) which might transform his learning into realisation and give him the peace supreme.

Nayinar's presence kept off idle crowds and minimised the disturbance to *samadhi*. But he could not remain with the Swami always. During the long spells of Nayinar's absence, not only was there frequent disturbance by the curious, but the pest of frolicsome youths was also revived. There was no dark pit here to hide in; and many of them still considered Swami a crazy youth who was lawful game for all their mirth and play. The liberties they took may be illustrated by an instance. One day as he sat in *samadhi* at the foot of the *iluppai* tree forgetful of his body, a mischievous imp took the opportunity, when no one was in sight, of approaching him from behind and testing the intensity of his absorption. Liquid filth descended on the back of the Swami, thereby wetting his rags, and the lad must have tittered away wondering at his own cleverness. This young Swami was quite unaware of what had happened. Some time later his consciousness revived, and he wondered why the rags should be wet. Then from the smell he

*Standard Tamil works expounding Adwaita philosophy.

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gathered the prank that some little fellow had played upon him though no boy was standing near at the time. No anger was raised in his breast at such treatment.

Perhaps, also having played such a prank during his infancy he thought, "Thus the whirlgig of time brings in his revenges." Anyhow this *iluppai* tree was a place of much disturbance.

At about this time one Annamalai Tambiran came along with Uddandi Nayinar. By pure austerity and singing of *Tevaram** with crowds of followers, he collected alms, fed the poor, and maintained the worship of his Adheena Guru in a building which was therefore known as *Gurumurtam* in a suburb of Tiruvannamalai. Happening to pass near the *iluppai* tree he was deeply impressed with the purity of heart and the ecstatic state of the young Swami and thereafter constantly accompanied Nayinar to see him. One day he told the Swami that his Guru's shrine was away from the village, quite a retired spot where the Swami could carry on his meditation undisturbed by people, and requested him to go there. The Swami agreed, and in Feb. 1897 took up his residence at the shrine. The Tambiran daily recited there hundreds of *Tevaram* hymns which were elevating and instructive, and which might even be a sufficient outfit for one's spiritual culture.

As the Swami continued to neglect his comforts and even cleanliness he rose in popular esteem. His body was

* Tevaram is the name given to the sacred songs of the three Tamil poet-saints, Appar, Sundaramurti and Sambandar.

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besmeared with unwashed dirt, his hair became one clotted mass, and his finger-nails grew so long and curly that his hands were not useful for any purpose. He sat for some weeks on a floor which was always infested by ants, and despite their constant crawling and biting he sat for hours with eyes closed, leaning against the wall in *Samadhi*, to leave on it the imprint of his back. The visitors could not endure for even a few minutes the ant trouble which he endured for hours, days and weeks, losing his body consciousness. The Swami was therefore provided after some time with a stool in a corner, the feet of the stool being placed in water. But even then his leaning on the wall gave the ants their chance and left another impress on the wall which is even now faintly discernible. People swarmed to see this height of self-neglect; some said: "This Swami must be very old," and pointed to the length of his nails as proof. Many people jumped to the conclusion that, being so saintly, he could grant them all the boons they desired, such as wealth, health, issue, and salvation, and poured praises into his ears and offerings at his feet. All this developed the Swami's humility, patience, endurance, and self-restraint, आत्मविनिग्रह, though to some extent they proved a disturbance to his meditation, which however was minimised by a bamboo palisade placed round him. His fame steadily increased as days passed; and this meant increased disturbance and increased self-restraint, though the question of food-supply (if it ever was a question) was completely solved. For the first month or two at Gurumurtam, the Tambiran supplied *Naivedya, i.e.*, food offered at the shrine of his Guru. The Tambiran then left, telling Nayinar to look after the Swami, and promised to return in a week. But he did not return till after a year. Nayinar also was

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called away to his *mutt* (religious foundation) a few weeks after Tambiran left. So no one was left to look after the Swami. But with the increasing fame of the Swami there was no difficulty in respect of food-supply. Many came with their occasional food-offerings, and a few undertook a regular supply of food, each insisting that he or she should have the merit of feeding this ascetic. The only difficulty was to keep the rush away from the Swami after Nayinar left as there was no permanent attendant to perform that function. In a few months, even this was solved.

There was a Malayali by name Palaniswamy carrying on the worship of God Vinayaka in the town, and living upon the *Naivedya* (food offered to the God) as his solitary meal for the day, not even using salt for seasoning. One Srinivasa Iyer, seeing him at this devotion to the image, advised him to drop it or alter his course. "What use," said Iyer, "is there in spending your lifetime with this stone Swami? There is a young Swami in flesh and blood at Gurumurtam. He is steeped in austerities (*Tapas*) like the youthful Dhruva mentioned in the Puranas. If you go and serve him, and adhere to him, your life would serve its purpose." Others also pointed out to him that the Swami had no attendant, and that it was a blessing to serve such a rapt soul. Spurred on by such encomia Palaniswamy went to Gurumurtam, saw the Swami and at once realised that he had discovered his Saviour. At first Palaniswamy continued his worship at the Vinayakar temple, but in a short while his faith in the living Guru increased and became all-absorbing, so that he discontinued his worship at the temple. Thus the old order changed, yielding place to new; and God

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(Vinayaka) fulfilled* himself by sending the devotee on to Brahmana Swami, who thenceforward was his all in all, his only raft to cross this ocean of misery, and his anchor for the remaining term (nearly twenty-one years) of his life. Palaniswamy attended constantly on the Swami, in fact followed him like a shadow, received the bits of food-offerings supplied, mixed them up and offered them (a cupful at noon) to the Swami as his mid-day meal, and returned the rest of the offerings to those who brought them, as *Bhuktasesha* or *Prasada*, that is, the blessing of the Swami.

One or two incidents of the Swami's life at Gurumurtam may be set down here as indicative of his attitude towards others and their attitude towards him.

The Tambiran was getting over-zealous in his attention; one day he was arranging to get oil, sandal paste, etc., and making great preparation for treating the young Swami, exactly as the sacred idol in all temples is treated. He proposed, in fact, to pour over the Swami's devoted head oil, water, milk, food, etc. The young Swami did not relish the proposed treatment. So the next day, before the Tambiran arrived with food, the young Swami wrote with a piece of charcoal upon the adjoining wall the following Tamil words "இதற்குத் தொண்டு இதுவே," which means, "This (food) alone is the service (needed) for this (body)." When the Tambiran came and placed the food before him the Swami pointed to the writing on the

* It is hardly necessary to assure the readers that no disrespect towards or attack against worship of idols is intended by the above recital or a similar recital in Chapter XIV. See also for Maharshi's views on the subject, *infra*.

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wall, and thus made him understand that the ostentatious worship proposed by him was unacceptable. Incidentally, the revelation was first made to the Tiruvannamalai public that this 'Brahmana Swami' or 'Gurumurtam Swami' was a person with education who could write Tamil—even good Tamil. This discovery led to the early disclosure of his identity.

Amongst the sincere admirers that constantly visited him was a Taluk Head Accountant, Venkatarama Iyer. When he found that the Swami could write, the idea seized him to learn the identity of the Swami, that is, his name and the place he hailed from. In the presence of Tambiran and others he put the question to the Swami, who however remained silent despite repeated questions. Iyer, with the persistence of Delilah and Vivien, declared that he would not move from there till he should learn those facts, even if his prolonged stay there should involve official trouble due to his absence from the Taluq Office and intensity of hunger by keeping away from home. Moved by the ardour of this aged admirer's zeal the Swami then wrote down in English his name and village as "Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi." The officer wondered what "Tiruchuzhi" was, being unacquainted with any such place. The Swami then picked up a copy of Periapuranam (*vide* p. 17) lying by his side, and showed him the name 'Tiruchuzhi', as that of a village honoured by the classic song of Sundaramurti Swami.

There were tamarind trees in the garden surrounding Gurumurtam and those in charge of it had gone away somewhere one day. A gang of thieves came in and wanted to collect and carry off the tamarind produce.

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Noticing the silent Swami at the foot of the tamarind tree without any attendant, one thief said to another, "I say, bring some கள்ளிப்பால், (*i.e.*, the corrosive milk juice of euphorbia tirucalli) ; let us throw it into this man's eyes and see if he will speak or not." The Swami who maintained his *Mounam* (rule of silence), neither spoke nor moved ; he showed no concern as to what might happen to his body or to the tamarind fruit. So another broke out and said "Oh, don't mind him, what harm does he do us ? Let us get along." So without molesting him, they carried off the plunder. Alike at the time of the plunder as at the time of the threat Brahmana Swami merely looked on unconcerned, and, as Tennyson puts it,

. . . . . "let the world have its way :

For Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal.

The May fly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike,

And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder and prey."

* * * *

For the maker's drift is dark, an Isis hid by a veil.

Who knows the ways of the world, how God will bring them about ?

* * * *

I have not made the world, and he that made it will guide."

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The Swami's daily routine of life during the year and a half that he stayed at Gurumurtam, was to be in rapt *samadhi*, only disturbed by the noise of visitors, and the dinner cup. This was his only meal and sufficed just to keep body and soul together; no wonder the former grew thin and looked like a skeleton. He had no exercise and sometimes days passed before a slight relief was afforded to the distended bowels. He would sit on the bench, mostly dazed, not knowing and not caring if it was morning or evening, one day or another of the week. He had just strength and clearness enough to retain his sitting posture, and if he tried to get up, he was unsuccessful. He would just lift himself up some inches and feeling giddy, sink back into his seat as the safer position. Again he would try with similar results. Only after repeated efforts could he get up and go out. On one such occasion he had got up and reached the door when he found Palaniswami holding him with both arms. Reproachfully he asked him, "Why do you hold me?" The latter replied, "Swami was about to fall, and so I held him and prevented the fall." The Swami was at the time holding the door with both arms, and was not aware that he was about to fall.

After eighteen months thus spent in the midst of visitors' disturbance, to prevent which Palaniswamy often locked him in when he went out, the Swami and his attendant moved on to the adjoining mango grove into which no one was allowed to enter except with the permission of the owner, one Venkatarama Naicker. The Swami and Palaniswamy each occupied a field-watchman's loft, (பரண்) under the shade of a mango tree. Here unmolested by visitors, they felt freer; and six months

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were thus happily spent. It was during these months that Palaniswami, having ample leisure and access to a library in the town, brought several Tamil books on Vedanta, *e.g.*, Kaivalya Navanitam, Vedanta-Chudamani, Vasishtham, etc. He was struggling painfully with them, word by word, in the Swami's presence. The Swami, wishing to lighten his labour, took each book from him, rapidly absorbed its contents, and, retaining the same in his memory, imparted the gist of it to the amazed disciple. The study of books was not necessary for his (the Swami's) religious contemplation or realisation. That had been achieved already and required no fresh buttress. It was the need to explain its ethical and metaphysical basis and to answer the questions of those who resorted to him, book in hand or after study, that made him look into such books. With his naturally clear intellect and retentive memory, assisted by his illuminating experience, he easily understood and explained them to his questioners. In the same way he picked up a knowledge of religious books in other languages, *e.g.*, in Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam, as also by moving closely with those who had mastery of these languages, so in course of time he was able to express his living thought in writing in them all.

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CHAPTER XI

TRACED AT LAST

अहमेको न मे कश्चित् नाहमन्यस्य कस्यचित् ।
न तं पश्यामि यस्याहं तं न पश्यामि यो मम ॥

"I am alone. None is mine; of none else am I; I see not any of whom I am; nor do I see one that is mine."

Mahabharata, Sant. 329.

Then one said unto him, "Behold, thy mother and brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." "But," he answered and said, "who is my mother and who are my brethren?"

St. Mathew.

WHEN Venkataraman suddenly left Madura on the 29th August, 1896, his absence was soon noticed and the letter left by him among his brother's books was picked up. It was like the explosion of a bomb for the family; they never even dreamt that the boy would bolt away. Nothing harsh was said; or at any rate nothing harsher than the usual scolding was given him; and yet the boy had run away without telling any one! Where could he have gone? They began to search for him, and communicated the painful news to his mother and relations at Manamadura. To her especially it was a bolt from the blue. They tried their best to get a clue by enquiring of friends, neighbours and others. But none gave any useful information. The boy had taken away three

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rupees and would not be in immediate want. The usual solaces that the boy would return soon, especially after his funds get exhausted, we may take it, were offered to the mother. Days, weeks and months passed ; yet the boy did not return. The mother grew anxious and entreated her brothers-in-law, Subbier and Nelliappier, to go out and seek him and come back with him. Some one said that the boy had joined a dramatic troupe which was playing at Trivandrum (which then retained its fame as the land of milk and honey, where strangers never lacked food). So Mr. Nelliappier started for Trivandrum and enquired of dramatic sets, but found no trace. Alagammal insisted on her joining the party at the second search and at Trivandrum she saw a boy just of Venkataraman's age and height with similar hair turning his back on her and going away. That must be Venkataraman she thought. But they could not get at him. Greatly depressed, the search party returned home. And as years passed the chance of discovering him was getting very remote, and the family well nigh despaired of seeing him again.

In 1898, on May 1st, Subbier died at Madura. Nelliappier and family went there for the funeral. Before the ceremonies were over, a young man of Tiruchuzhi gave them unexpected news of their long-lost boy. "Venkataraman is a revered saint at Tiruvannamalai," he said, and mentioned also how he came to learn the fact. He had gone on business to a mutt at Madura and had heard one Annamalai Tambiran describing with great reverence the sanctity of a young saint living at Tiruvannamalai. Tambiran mentioned the saint as hailing from Tiruchuzhi. This at once caught the ear of the Tiruchuzhi youth, who then ascertained further parti-

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culars from Tambiran. The youth felt that the saint must be *their* Venkataraman and consequently hastened to impart the news to the family.

Soon after the funeral Nelliappier (who was a second-grade pleader practising at Manamadura) started for Tiruvannamalai along with a friend. They came and found that the young Swami had taken up residence at the mango grove. They went there and wanted to enter, but the owner refused them admission. "He is a *mouni*, a silent saint," said he, "why go in and trouble him?" Then they pleaded they were his relatives and would be content merely to see him, but pleaded in vain. Then Nelliappier wrote a chit,

"மானமதுரை வக்கீல் நெல்லையப்பையர் தரிசனம் செய்ய விரும்புகிறார்"

i.e., "Nelliappier, pleader of Manamadura, wishes to have your darshan," and handing it to the garden owner, said: "Show him this letter, and if your Swami allows our entry, you may then take us in." This was taken to the Swami, who noticed at once that the chit was a paper of the Registration Department, which on one side had some office matter inscribed on it in his elder brother Nagaswami's handwriting. This showed him that Nagaswami had joined the Registration Department as a clerk. On the other side the chit bore his uncle's writing. So he agreed to the uncle coming in to see him. Nelliappier was then permitted to enter. When he beheld his nephew in the uncouth, dirt-laden Swami before him with matted hair and curled nails, conflicting emotions of joy and sorrow seized him. As the Swami was a *mouni*, Nelliappier addressed Palaniswami and Naicker, and said that

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it gave him much pleasure to find one of his family attaining high sainthood. However, considerations of comfort should not be ignored. The relatives desired that the young Swami should be near them. They did not want him to abandon his vows or mode of life. Let him continue a *mouni* and an ascetic. But at Manamadura, where Nelliappier was living, the *samadhi* of a great saint was available and the Swami could well go and live there. All his wants would be attended to, while his pious, dedicated life would be undisturbed. In this strain, the pleader pleaded hard. But whatever success his pleading might have had elsewhere, with his nephew it had absolutely none. Stone-like the youth sat and heard, but showed not the slightest change in his expression. This "sublime self-restraint" (आत्मविनिग्रह) was carried by him to such a degree of perfection that Nelliappier felt convinced that his nephew's nature had altered, and that he had not the least desire to be near his relatives. So, he and his friend communicated to Alagammal the good news that her boy had indeed been found and seen by them, coupled with the distressing news that the boy was thoroughly altered and did not care to go back; and they left for Madura after a stay of five days at Tiruvannamalai.

For some reasons, the mango grove proving no longer convenient, the Swami moved on to a small temple of Arunagirinathar (the local God—not the Tamil poet of that name). When he started from the grove he wished to see if he could remain absolutely alone without contact, even the contact of an ardent disciple like Palaniswami; and so he told him: "You go one way, beg your food and get on. Let me go another way, beg my food and get on. Let us not live together." But Palaniswami,

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after the day's begging was over, came back to the Arunagirinathar temple. "Where can I go? You have the words of life," was what he felt. It was no more possible for him to break away from the Swami than for a tender calf to break away from its mother.

After a month's stay at that temple and a week's stay in the towers of the big temple and *Alari* garden therein, to which place also many of the Swami's admirers pursued him, he went away to Pavazhakkunru, (one of the spurs of the Arunachala Hill) on which were an Iswara temple, a spring and a cave, with a mutt at the foot. In the temple he would sit and meditate and, during the absence of Palaniswami from town, would go and beg for food. The temple priest, not caring to see if the Swami was inside the cell within the temple, would sometimes lock him in and go away after performing the worship. Many pious people would go to the Swami and wait for his emergence from the cell. For some five or six months the Swami stayed at Pavazhakkunru. And before he moved away from there the firmness of his detachment (*Vairagya*) was again put to a severe test.

When Alagammal learnt of the discomfiture of Nelliappier she must have put it down to his deficient affection for her son. She would go herself and bring back her beloved son, she thought. So she told her first son Nagaswamy to obtain leave for a week; but as that was not easy to get she waited for the Christmas holidays and then started for Tiruvannamalai in his company. When they reached the place and learnt that the Swami was at Pavazhakkunru, they climbed up and saw him lying on a rock. Alagammal recognised her Venkataraman with true

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maternal instinct, despite his matted hair, dirt-laden body, overgrown nails and dirty cod-piece. She bemoaned his condition, and requested him to go back; but the lad sat unmoved.

Whether it is a Christian starting on his pilgrimage, or a Maharaja entering on asceticism (துறவு) the call of friends and relatives is sure to come very early as an obstacle to further progress. The attachment to the mother is the strongest tie binding a man to his home. Yet even that has to be snapped in one's onward march. The old Adam then pulls off a part of the pilgrim's heart; and much torture has to be endured. Yes, the successful pilgrim or saint faces the ordeal, endures the torture, and is rewarded with a crown of glory and eternal bliss in the end. Alagammal and Nagaswamy day after day visited the boy, bringing him sweetmeats and their repeated entreaties to go back, but they were of no avail. One day however she used her sharpest weapon of attack. As she upbraided Venkataraman for his indifference she suddenly burst into tears. The young Swami could bear it no longer; he got up at once and went away. Again on another day she sought him, and pleaded hard. As the Swami sat still and stone-like, she went to the people who had come there, mentioned her relationship, poured her tale of woe into their ears, and requested their intercession with the Swami whom they had come to serve. Then one among them, Pachaiyappa Pillai, said to the Swami:

'Your mother is weeping and praying. Why do you not answer her? Whether it is 'yes' or 'no', why not give her a reply? Swami need not break his vow of

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silence. Here are pencil and paper. Swami may at least write out what he has to say."

Thus persuaded, the Swami took up the paper and pencil, and wrote as follows in Tamil :—

"அவரவர் பிராரப்தப் பிரகாரம் அதற்கானவ ஞ்காங்கிருந் தாட்டுவிப்பன். என்றும், நடவாத தென்முயற்சிக்கினும் நடவாது ; நடப்பதென் றடை செய்யினு நில்லாது. இதுவே திண்ணம். ஆதலின் மௌனமாயிருக்கை நன்று."

"The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds—their *prarabdhakarma*. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen,—try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is for one to be silent."

Whether this bit of her son's philosophy was sound or unsound, convincing or unconvincing, she had no option but to go away. The holidays were over, and Nagaswamy had to go back to his office. "Is it for this," sighed she, "that we came ?" ; so with her first son she came down the hill and left for Manamadura with a heavy heart.

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CHAPTER XII

THE LIGHT ON THE HILL

Ye are the light of the World. A City that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candle-stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

SHORTLY after the mother and brother left the Swami quitted Pavazhakkunru and went up the hill, Arunachala. Here, as varying circumstances dictated, he moved from cave to cave. These were the mansions in his Father's house, and he was welcome and at home in each. His increasing popularity and esteem ensured a stream of visitors to give him food, even if he went to the very top of the hill, which would be about two miles of rugged path. His first cave on the hill was the Virupaksha. It has the shape of the sacred Pranava Mantra ॐ ("Om"), and contains the sacred remains of a saint, Virupakshadeva. The trustees of the Virupaksha Mutt were supposed to be in charge. However, when the Swami went up, no one was in charge, and the cave was not locked. There were two factions, each claiming the right to control the properties and income of that mutt; and as litigation was still pending, neither party came up to look after the cave, the worship therein and its scanty income at the Kartikai season. So for some years, the Swami was left in undisturbed occupation. Later on the litigation having ended, the successful party came up at the ensuing Kartikai festival and resumed the levy of a small fee on each visitor. Formerly very few would visit and pay.

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Now that the Swami was occupying it, large crowds daily visited it even in months other than Kartikai. A few went there for purposes of picnic, as the adjoining tamarind tree-shade and the streamlet, with its tiny water-fall, were lovely spots for that purpose; but most pilgrims came for the purely spiritual benefit of beholding the Swami. During the festival the crowds increased tenfold; they poured in to see him. Few of these cared to submit to this levy of three pies per head, and many went away disappointed. This soon reached the ears of the Swami. Loathing the acquisition or possession of money for himself, he had an equal loathing to his sanctity being exploited by others, and to the exclusion of the people who could not or would not pay. So he moved out of the cave to the open front-yard under a tree. The agent then shifted his place of collection to the outer compound and still tried to levy the fee from everyone that wished to go near. The Swami had no particular attachment to this cave, though it was highly convenient as his residence. But a further stay there meant his countenancing the extracting of money from the pious visitors,—a tax on piety! So he promptly left that cave for the lower one, "the Sadguruswami's cave", and thence soon after to another. The levying authorities discovered that their cave was now deserted and that the bees of devotion had flown away to the lower hives and were buzzing round the flower of sainthood there. The only result of their efforts was merely to oust and inconvenience the Swami without any gain to themselves. Hence they gave up their "dog-in-the-manger" policy, intimated to him that they would not levy any fee so long as he occupied their cave, and invited him to re-occupy it. So the Swami returned.

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The Virupaksha cave was quite suitable for winter residence, but not for summer when the adjoining streamlet would dry up, and no breeze would get into it. There was a crude cave near Mulaipal Tirtham at the foot of a mango tree, whence it received its name, the mango-tree-cave, which was unfit for occupation when the Swami first went up the hill. By the enterprise of two brothers the overhanging rock was blasted, a small front-wall was erected with a very small hole and door —and the cave became tenantable. The brothers invited the Swami to occupy it. Accordingly he spent some of the summer months there, as the adjoining tank (Mulaipal Tirtham) yielded an unfailing supply of pure, potable water. As already stated wherever he went his faithful Adam, Palaniswami, was always by his side, rendering service; and crowds of admirers came, many of them bringing food, cake, milk, fruits, etc. Besides Palaniswami, others now began to attach themselves permanently to the Swami and live with him. 'Share and share alike' was always the Swami's motto; and food had to be found for all of them. Since they could not be sure of the visitors feeding them all, Palaniswami and other dependants would start from the hill and go to the town to beg. This would suffice to feed the Swami, his attendants and visitors, both day and night. Those who went called upon God as they went blowing the conch. One of the devotees requested the Swami to write a song for this purpose, so Brahmana Swami composed his poem *Aksharamanamalai* which was full of pathos and philosophy.

How was the Swami spending his time in all these caves? Exactly in the same way as at Gurumurtam, mango tope, and Pavazhakkunru. There was no noticeable

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variation in his life. He was mostly in meditation or rather realisation.

यस्त्वात्मरतिरेव स्यात् आत्मतृप्तश्च मानवः ।
आत्मन्येवच सन्तुष्टः तस्यकार्यं न विद्यते ॥

"For one who rejoices in, and is contented with, the Self, there is nothing to do."

But often when visitors or dependants came up and wished to clear their doubts, relating mostly to the books they had read and had brought with them, he would read and master the books with ease, and give a simple explanation based partly on the books and partly on his own experience. The Swami's teachings would throw clear light on their problems, and give a new angle of vision; the solution would then be quite simple. Palaniswami continued to bring books from the town. A Sastri from Chidambaram came up and left his Vivekachudamani (by Sri Sankaracharya), an excellent manual of Vedantism in Sanskrit, beyond which one need read nothing to prepare oneself for self-realization. This, with the help of a Tamil versified translation brought by Palaniswami, was mastered in no time. Later on the Swami rendered it into easy Tamil prose at the request of some devotees.

Happy are they who have no history to be written about them. The Swami's personal history practically ended with his advent to the hill; and thereafter it became really the history of those who went to him and came under his influence which his biographer had to write. Though their name is legion, a few * may be

* Any selection seems invidious. But some have to be selected from those whose spiritual careers have been communicated to the author.

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selected to give the reader an idea of the Swami's life, influence, and teachings.

Uddandi Nayinar, the first to receive the Swami's instructions, returned to his mutt in 1897. He visited the Swami again seven years later. After disposing of his possessions mostly for charity, he brought a sum of one hundred rupees and offered it to the Swami—as *gurudakshina* (gift to the preceptor). But the Guru strictly adhered to this vow of poverty, and sternly refused to receive the grateful disciple's offer. But Nayinar was not to be so easily put off, and he left the sum without the Swami's knowledge with another devotee, instructing him to apply it to any good purpose for the Swami or such as the Swami would approve of. The fund remained idle for some years. Meanwhile, the Swami's half-written Tamil translation of Vivekachudamani was picked up and quickly completed; this fund of one hundred rupees was utilised for printing the book; and Nayinar rejoiced.

Nayinar visited the Swami once or twice again leaving the body about 1916, having no doubt gained considerable spiritual purity and excellence at the feet of the Master.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE SWAMI AND BOOK-LORE

And what delights can equal those
That stir spirit's inner deeps,
When one that loves but knows not, reaps
A truth from one that loves and knows?

Tennyson.

WHEN Brahmana Swami came to Virupaksha cave he still attracted large crowds of all sorts and conditions: the poor for food or help from others who came there; the curious for novelty; the proud scholar to see if the Swami was learned; and lastly the humble and pious students of religious literature, anxious to get the gracious words of enlightenment from one that had achieved self-realisation. Of this last class, Uddandi Nayinar and Annamalai Tambiran who had come to him while on the plains, were good examples. Even on the hill such people occasionally visited him. A Sastri from Chidambaram, as already stated, came with a copy of Sankaracharya's 'Vivekachudamani,' which he left with the Swami, who perused it. With his powerful memory, clear intellect, fresh mind and keen interest and, above all, his deep religious introspection, the Swami, with a single glance at a book, was able to take in not merely the meaning, but also the very words and to indelibly imprint them on the tablets of his memory. Padmanabha Swami (known as Jatai Swami on account of his matted locks) had with him several Sanskrit books on Mantra

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and Ayurveda, a Brihat-Stotra-Ratnakara and other works of religious and philosophic interest. The Brahmana Swami would visit his Asram on the hill in the early days of his sojourn and occasionally dip into several of these very quickly. When some one once asked Padmanabha Swami about some matter, the *Mouni* Brahmana Swami picked up Brihat-Stotra-Ratnakara and pointed out a passage in answer. Padmanabha Swami wondered at the ready and appropriate answer. He would often have this *Mouni's* help in such matters. The young Swami's mind was fresh and plastic. Several scholars and persons of vast experience and skill went to the Swami to get inspiration, and freely ventilated their thoughts before him. What with the hearing of recitations and the reading of books brought to him by Palaniswami and others, the Swami was getting conversant with the philosophical literature of the land.

G. Seshier was a Municipal Overseer at Tiruvannamalai about 1900; from which time, he assiduously paid his respects to the Swami. He was a devout Ramabhakta (devotee of Rama), constantly repeating the holy name of Rama with or without musical accompaniments. He was also studying Yoga, specially Vivekananda's lectures (in English) on Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, etc., and an English translation of Rama Gita. Finding some difficulty in understanding these and similar books, he brought them to the Swami and mentioned his difficulties. The Swami then went through each of them and wrote out in easy Tamil prose the gist of these works on bits of paper and answered similarly supplemental questions. Thus Seshier had quite a sheaf of these slips written by the Swami in 1900, 1901 and 1902; and he copied them into a small note-book. Some years ago Seshier left this world; but

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his note-book and some of the slips, which had been preserved, were obtained through the kindness of his elder brother, G. Krishna Iyer. From these slips and the note book, the recent publication, "Vichara Sangraha"* was prepared, which may therefore be regarded as the gist of the Swami's earliest teachings.

One feature of the Swami's dealing with such disciples is noticeable. He would let them take their own course for a while, giving them advice for pursuing the line of thought or action already taken ; and only at a later stage, would he turn them into his own line of thought.

यस्य यस्य हि यो भावस्तेन तेन समाचरेत् ।
अनुप्रविश्य मेधावी क्षिप्रमात्मवशं नयेत् ॥

i.e., "Give him full rope and then pull him ashore," has been his principle. This is especially noticeable in Seshier's case. Seshier was deeply interested in *Ashtanga Yoga* and attached great importance to breath-control *(Pranayama)*. The Swami has said over and over again that he never cared to practise *Pranayama,* which is only *one* of the means employed for subduing the mind for a while and fixing it on one point within, and on the Self at last. In the Swami's case the mind's outgoing tendency was arrested in his own peculiar way, and he attained *samadhi* without trying to control his breath. As this pupil was anxious to know about *Pranayama,* the Swami studied the easy brochure of Vivekananda and wrote down brief notes. We notice that at each stage, when the opportunity offers, he puts in a word about the need for going deeper, and

* This was translated into English and published under the title "A Catechism of Enquiry" or "Self Enquiry"—*Publisher.*

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even interprets *Ashtanga Yoga* in a spiritual way. The subject of realisation is gradually broached after a few preliminary explanations about the mind, the centre, "the Heart," and the rudiments of epistemology and metaphysics as conceived by Indian thinkers in Hindu books. The Swami never makes any critical study of Indian thought or offer his own estimate of the various schools. He reads the books preferred by the particular disciple and offers the opinion of the school embodied therein. He never engages in controversy, as it concerns only the externals and the activities of the intellect. When the intellect gives place to intuition, there is no difference in the ultimate realisation, be it that of an *Advaitin, Dvaitin* or *Visishtadvaitin*, a *Saivite* or *Sakta*. The works dealt with by him by way of translation into Tamil or adaptation are, however, of the *Advaitic* school. The succeeding chapters will enable the reader to judge for himself how the Swami's line of thought should be classed.

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CHAPTER XIV

M. SIVAPRAKASAM PILLAI AND THE SWAMI

"कोहं कथमिदं चेति संसारमलमावतं ।
प्रविचार्य प्रयत्नेन प्राज्ञेन सहसाधुना ॥"

Who am I? Whence is this widespread *Samsara*, i.e., flow of births and deaths? These, the wise should enquire into diligently, soon—nay, now."

Mahopanishad IV, 21

कोऽहं कथमिदं किंवा कथं मरणजन्मनी ।
विचारयान्तरेवेत्थं महत्तत्फलमेष्यसि ॥

Who am I? How (came) this (world)? What is it? How (came) death and birth? Thus inquire within yourself, and great will be your benefit therefrom.

Annapurnopanishad I, 39.

राम स्वात्मविचारोयं कोहं स्यामिति रूपकः ।
चित्तदुर्द्रुमबीजस्य दहने दहनस्स्मृतः ॥

Rama, this inquiry "Who am I?" is the quest of the self and is said to be the fire that burns up the seed of the poisonous weed of conceptual thought.

Vasishtam.

THE next person of note to whom the Swami imparted instruction was M. Sivaprakasam Pillai (a graduate in Philosophy) employed in the Revenue Department of the South Arcot Collectorate from 1900 to 1910. During his college days the question of personality (the question "Who am I?") arose in the course of his studies, but he did not pursue it with vigour. He happened to go to

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Tiruvannamalai for the first time in 1902 on official work. He then heard of the singularly selfless and illumined life the Swami led. So he visited him, waited on him patiently, and entreated him to give him guidance and instruction. He also put the Swami some questions in connection with the above inquiry. At that time the Swami was observing silence. Therefore the questions were sometimes answered by gestures. At times when such answers were not understood, they were written down on the floor or on a slate. The questions and answers were published by Sivaprakasam Pillai in 1923, along with a couple of poems describing the Swami's life and his own special experiences with the Swami. The answer to the fourteenth question was written down by the Swami on a slate, and copied immediately after on paper by the questioner and retained by him. The other questions and answers were written down from memory subsequently. These however had not immediately affected his official life. His non-attachment slowly developed, and in 1910 resulted in his resignation of service. He continued his visits to the Swami off and on. However, there was no perceptible break with his past, nor had he any emotional experience till 1913. He had then become a widower, and it was all important for him to decide if he should wed or lead a *vanaprastha's* (forest hermit's) life. If he was to wed, the choice of the bride was another difficult problem. Above all, marriage meant considerable expense in his community and circumstances; and how was he to obtain the needed sum was perplexing his mind. To solve these problems, he hit upon a plan. He had faith in the local God Vighneswara and accordingly repaired to His temple at night ; and there he intently prayed to Him as his sole refuge and help. He set down on paper the

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questions noted hereunder, and prayed that he might be blessed with a vision and personal instruction, or (if that were not possible,) that appropriate answers might appear written on the paper under each of the questions, and that in any case the answers should be forthcoming before the night ended. He further promised that, if instructions were issued to him, he would follow them, and that if none were issued, he would go to the Brahmana Swami at Tiruvannamalai and be guided by him.

The questions were as follows :—

(1) What am I to do to escape all sorrows and cares on earth ?

(2) Shall I get married to the particular girl I am thinking of ?

(3) If that is not to be, why is it not to be ?

(4) If the marriage is to come off, how is the necessary fund to be secured ?

This questionnaire was reverently placed by Siva-prakasam Pillai at the feet of Vighneswara ; and all night long he waited in patient expectation. But the night was spent, and dawn broke, without any vision. As for the question paper, it remained just as he left it ; no answer had been vouchsafed. With a sad heart he then went away from the image that having ears heard not, and having a mouth spoke not, and came to the living Guru, the Brahmana Swami, who could hear and speak. Evidently God Vighneswara* fulfilled Himself once more by transferring His devotee to Brahmana Swami. Pillai patiently waited on the Swami at the Virupaksha cave, without mentioning his worries, and noted what transpired.

* Same as Vinayaka referred to on p. 54.

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Numbers of visitors came to the Swami; and the Swami was discoursing with them on the *summum-bonum* of life, Self-realisation, the one-pointed life, and the way to reach it. Day after day Pillai stayed by his side without mentioning his thoughts and found that he was giving the same unwordly instruction to all comers. He found that the Swami's life and teachings were themselves replies to his unuttered questions. The Swami was in strict *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) and yet was undisturbed by sex passion; as for money, he never even mentioned it, nor wanted it. Yet, he was quite happy. He had realised the Self. There was nothing more for him to desire or achieve. Pillai felt ashamed to broach the subject of marriage, or funds for marriage, in such a Presence, and was convinced that the Swami's life and teachings gave a negative reply to his second question.

When he thought of going back to his village on 4th May 1913, something remarkable took place. There were many persons with the Swami; Pillai also was sitting nearby. He went on gazing at the Swami; and ere long, he had a strange vision. The Swami's face was no longer the ordinary human face. A dazzling aura was surrounding him. From his head, lo! a golden child gradually emerged and before long re-entered it. This strange phenomenon repeated itself twice or thrice. Sivaprakasam Pillai could hold out no more. He felt deeply agitated at this sudden proof of the existence of a higher benign power.* His heart welled up with emotion; tears of ecstasy flowed from his eyes; and he sobbed, unable to express what he felt. Those present did not see

* *Cf.* W. James' Varieties of R. E. pp. 190—2, 219, 228, 276 269 (Conquering Sex.)

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any vision and wondered what the matter was with Pillai. When later he communicated his vision, they cracked jokes at his expense. He was in no joking mood however. Next evening, that is, on the 5th May, he sat before the Swami. This day also he saw a vision. The Swami was suddenly seen surrounded by a halo which was as powerful as a number of full moons thrown together. The Swami's body was shining gold like the morning sun, and again his entire body smeared with holy ashes.† His eyes beamed with mercy. There were others in the room at the time, but they did not see any such vision. Pillai did not ask the Swami about these matters, nor did the Swami say anything. Two days later when Pillai went and saw the Swami, the latter appeared like a mass of crystal to Pillai's eyes. Pillai's heart overflowed with joy and he was afraid to leave the Swami lest the joy should suddenly cease. All this convinced Sivaprakasam Pillai that he had obtained the grace of the Swami. He resolved to lead a similar life of *Tapas* (austere penance) curbing all sex desires and observing *Brahmacharya* (celibacy).

All the above facts are substantially taken from Pillai's *Anugraha Ahaval,* a Tamil poem wherein he gratefully describes his relations with the Swami. From these one infers that the Swami has a powerful, magnetic personality, that, by staying with him for some time a person may change his life, habits and instincts, and that by his grace one can receive faith in God as tangibly and certainly as one receives a fruit or a book.

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† In point of fact the Swami has at no time applied ashes to his whole body.

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The fourteen questions and answers elicited in 1902, or soon after from the Swami are set out hereunder :—

Sivaprakasam Pillai : Swami, Who am I? How is salvation attained?

Swami : By incessantly pursuing within yourself the inquiry 'Who am I,' you will know your true self and thereby attain salvation.

Pillai : Who am I?

Swami : The real 'I' or true self is not the body nor any of the five senses, nor the sense-objects, nor the organs of action, nor the *Prana,* (breath or vital force), nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state where there is no cognisance of these.

P : If I am not any of these, what else am I?

S : After excluding each of the above, saying 'This is not I,' that which remains alone is 'I'; and that is consciousness.

P : What is the nature of that consciousness?

S : It is *Sat Chit Ananda* (*i.e.,* reality-consciousness-bliss), where there is not even the slightest trace of the thought 'I' at all. This is also called *Mouna* (silence), *Atman* (Self). The only thing that exists is That. The three (the world, ego, and God personal, *Iswara*) if considered as separate entities, are mere illusions, like the appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl. But God, the *Jiva* (ego) and the world as *Sivaswarupa* or *Atmaswarupa* are the Real one.

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P: How are we to realise that Real (or *Siva-swarupa*) ?

S: When the external objects (*drisya*) vanish, the true nature of the seer or subject is realised (to be the Real, the Absolute).

P: Can we not realise that (*Sivaswarupa*) while we see objects also ?

S: No. Because, the seer (the noumenon) and the seen (phenomena) are like the rope and the appearance of a serpent therein. Unless you get rid of the super-imposed illusion of a serpent, you cannot believe that what exists is only the rope.

P.: When will external objects vanish ?

S.: If the mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, vanishes, the external objects will vanish.

P.: What is the nature of the mind ?

S.: Mind is merely thoughts. It is a form of energy. It manifests itself as objects (*i.e.*, the world). When the mind sinks within the Self, *i.e.*, the *Sivaswarupa*, then the Self is realised. When the mind issues out, the world appears, and the Self is not realised.

P.: How will the mind vanish ?

S.: Only by pursuing the inquiry "Who am I ?" Though this enquiry is a mental operation only, it destroys all mental operations including itself just as the stick, with which the funeral pyre is kindled, is itself

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reduced to ashes after the pyre and corpses have been burnt. Then we attain knowledge or realisation of the Self. Then the thought 'I' (personality) is dissolved; breathing and other activities of *prana* (vitality) are subdued. Both, personality and breathing (*i.e., pranas*) have a common source. Whatever you do, do it without egoism, (*i.e.,*) without feeling "I am doing this." In that state, even one's own wife is seen as the Mother of the universe. True *Bhakti* (devotion) is the surrender of the ego into the Self.

P.: Are there not other methods to make the mind disappear?

S.: Except enquiry there is no other adequate method. If the mind is lulled by other means, it keeps quiet for a while, but again jumps up and returns to its former activity.

P.: When will these instincts and innumerable self-preserving and other latent tendencies (*vasanas*) be subdued?

S.: The more you withdraw into the Self, the more they pale off, and finally leave you.

P.: Is it indeed possible to root out all these tendencies, which have soaked into our minds in numerous births?

S.: Never give room for such doubts. But with firm resolve dive into the Self. The mind, constantly directed by the above inquiry, becomes dissolved, and transformed in the end into the Self. Whenever you feel any doubt, do not try to clear it; but try to know him who feels the doubt.

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P.: How long should one go on with this inquiry ?

S.: It is needed so long as there is the least trace of tendencies in the mind to create thoughts. So long as your enemies occupy a citadel, they will be issuing out. If you kill each as he issues out, the citadel will be captured by you in the end. Similarly, each time thoughts rear their heads and issue out, crush them by the above inquiry. This process of crushing all thoughts at their birthplace is termed *Vairagya* (dispassion). Hence inquiry is needed right up to Self-realisation. What is required is a continuous and uninterrupted "thought" of the real Self.

P.: Is not all this universe, with what takes place therein, the result of Iswara's will ; and if so why should He will thus ?

S.: God has no purpose. He is not fettered by any action. The world's activities cannot affect Him. As the sun rises without any desire, purpose, or effort, yet directly it rises numerous activities take place on this earth : the lens placed in its rays produces fire in its focus ; the bud of the lotus blossoms, water evaporates, and every living being enters upon, maintains, and finally drops its activity. But the sun is not affected by such activity, as it merely maintains its nature, acts by fixed laws, has no purpose, and is merely a witness. So it is with God. Again, take the case of space or ether. Earth, water, fire and air, are all in it, and have their motions and modifications therein. Yet none of these affects ether or space. The same is the case with God. God has no

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desire or purpose in His acts of creation, maintenance, destruction withdrawal, and salvation, to which the beings (*Jivas*) are subjected. As the beings (*Jivas*) reap the fruits of their acts in accordance with His laws (the laws of *Karma*, etc.) the responsibility * for such fruits is theirs, not God's. God is not affected or bound by any acts.

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* Creation is unique. It is in or after the creation of Time, Cause, individuals and social groups, that the ideas of 'purpose' and responsibility' (a purely social idea) emerge. There is no logic or meaning in applying these ideas to that which is beyond creation, *i.e.*, to God. Responsibility involves the idea of another. If God is regarded as immanent in all, there is no 'other' and hence no responsibility for God.

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CHAPTER XV

GANAPATI SASTRI AND THE SWAMI

A. GANAPATI SASTRI, known by his title Kavya Kanta, is the next disciple to be mentioned. His birth and early life have much of romance in them. At his birth in 1878, when his father Narasimha Sastri was praying before the God Ganapati at Benares, he had a vision of something like a babe or little animal running up to his feet from the God, which was the reason for the child's name Ganapati. Though dumb and afflicted with all sorts of disease, like enlarged liver and spleen and epileptic fits during his first five years, he was relieved of them in his sixth year by being branded with red-hot iron; and as though to make amends for the past dumbness, Ganapati Sastri exhibited marvellous powers of perception, attention, recollection and resourcefulness. Things once read were immediately understood, and never forgotten. He could attend to eight or ten things at a time (*Ashtavadhana*). He picked up learning with avidity; and at the age of ten, he had composed a verse in Sanskrit, prepared astrological almanacs, and mastered several *Kavyas* (literary works), and elementary books on grammar. At twelve he wrote *Bhringasandesa* in two cantos of *Mandakranta* metre, closely imitating Kalidasa. At fourteen he had mastered the *Panchakavyas* and the chief books on Sanskrit prosody and Rhetoric, besides being familiar with the contents of the national Epics, the *Itihasas,* Ramayana and Mahabharata, and some *Puranas.* At this age he could speak fluently and write with ease in

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Sanskrit. Besides literary ambition, he was from the age of ten consumed by another, which dominated his life ever since. The *Itihasas* and *Puranas, i.e.,* National Epics and Legends fired him with emulation of the ancient Rishis and Saints. If Viswamitra and Dhruva could by their *tapas, i.e., Mantrajapa* (repetition of sacred syllables) attain power enough to create new worlds or rise to be the pole star, he Ganapati Sastri of Kalavarai, could do the same. So from the age of eighteen, *i.e.,* soon after his marriage, he was visiting such holy places as the banks of the Godavari, the Ganges and the Jumna, as specially appropriate for his purpose, and spending considerable time on repeating the *Sivapanchakshari Mantra,* though he had had initiation into, and practice of, many other *mantras* as well. The interesting adventures of his *tapas,* which form the main item of his life, would fill a small volume *, but these are foreign to the purpose of this book. Suffice it to say that after a dozen trips to various parts of India where he performed *tapas* with a view to make Mahadeva (Siva) appear before him and grant him boons, he came to Tiruvannamalai first in 1903-4 and next in 1907, to some extent sadder and wiser. Though he had repeated a crore of *Sivapanchakshari* and as often written Siva's name, there had only been a few momentary visions and experiences which might be interpreted as appearances of *Siva,* yet God had not appeared to grant him any boons, and it looked as though his life's quest was a blank. His literary ambition had meanwhile taken him to Nuddea, where he dazzled a *Pandita Sabha* (an assembly of scholars under the presidentship of Asukavi Ambikadatta) with his mastery of Sanskrit

* Since written in Sanskrit by K. Sastri and published. —*Publisher.*

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style and literature, with his ease in *impromptu versification*, and his ready resource in *Samasya-poorana* and obtained the title (and diploma of) *Kavya Kanta* in 1900.

In 1903, he had chosen Tiruvannamalai as a good and holy seat of Siva in the shape of a *Jyotir linga*, for continuing his *tapas*. Incidentally having heard of Brahmana Swami on the hill, he visited him twice in the course of a twelve-months' stay. He then went away to Vellore as a teacher in a school, and organised a band of pupils round him who, with him for their head and guide, would develop their *Sakti* by force of *mantra* japa to such an extent as might impress the world with their ideas, and help in the uplift of their country, if not of humanity.

About December 1907, he gave up his post at the Vellore school and returned to Tiruvannamalai to resume his *mantra* japa. Doubts were oppressing him whether with all his vast study of *Puranas, Itihasas, Kavyas*, the whole of the Rig Veda, some Upanishads and several books on Mantra Sastra, he had correctly understood the nature and the essentials of *Tapas*, since nothing tangible seemed to emerge from his dozen years of penance in all sorts of places and under the most rigorous conditions. On the ninth day of the Kartikai festival about 1-30 p.m., he recollected that there was a Brahmana Swami on the hill who would certainly know the true nature of tapas from his own experience. In that hot hour he climbed up the hill. The Swami would distinctly remember him as the Pandit who, at his very first visit in 1903, had interpreted the well-known stotra of Vinayaka as applying

शुक्लांबरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ।
प्रसन्नवदनं ध्यायेत् सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

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to him (the Brahmana Swami) also, since he also wore white cloth, was all-pervasive (being identified with Divinity), of a pleasing moonlike colour, had consumed his *Antahkarana* (mind composed of the four parts *Manas, Buddhi, Ahankara,* and *Chitta, i.e.,* mind, reason, ego and will or desire), of a gracious mien, and would, if requested, remove obstacles from his devotee's path. The Swami with his fresh memory would not have forgotten that scene, nor the great sensation which Sastri (then moving unnoticed through the streets of Tiruvannamalai) produced in Kartikai of 1904, by reading a thousand brilliant Sanskrit verses on Siva which he had composed in Arunachaleswara temple in the few weeks preceding the festival.

Sastri quivered with emotion as he walked up to the Virupaksha cave. Luckily for him the Swami was seated alone on the outer *pial.* Sastri fell flat on his face and held the Swami's feet with both hands ; and his voice trembled with emotion as he cried : "All that has to be read I have read. Even Vedanta Sastra, I have fully understood. I have performed Japa to my heart's content. Yet I have not up to this time understood what *Tapas* is. Hence have I sought refuge at thy feet. Pray enlighten me about the nature of *Tapas.*" For fifteen minutes the Swami silently gazed at Sastri as he sat at his feet in anxious expectation. None came to interrupt them at the time. Then the Swami spoke in short and broken sentences in Tamil :

நான் நான் என்பது எங்கேயிருந்து புறப்படுகிறதோ அதை கவனித்தால் மனம் அங்கே லீனமாகும். அதுவே தபஸ்.

"If one watches whence this notion "I" springs, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *Tapas.*"

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ஒரு மந்திரத்தை ஜபம் பண்ணினால் அந்த மந்திரத்வனி எங்கிருந்து புறப்படுகிறது என்று கவனித்தால் மனம் அங்கே லீனமாகிறது. அதுதான் தபஸ்.

"When a mantra is repeated, if attention is directed to the source whence the mantra-sound is produced,* the mind is absorbed in that. That is Tapas."

This instruction filled Sastri's heart with joy. He stayed for some hours and ascertained the Swami's name from the attendant Palaniswamy to be "Venkatarama Ayyar." Sastri immediately composed five stanzas in praise of the Swami wherein he contracted his name into "Ramana" which has stuck to the Swami ever since. In the letter which Sastri wrote next day to his relations and disciples he mentioned the '*Upadesa*' instruction he received from the Swami known as "Brahmana Swami on the hill"; and added that he must henceforth be called "Maharshi," since his teaching was quite original, and nothing like what had been found in any book that Sastri had read. He wished all his own disciples to call Brahmana Swami § "*Bhagavan Maharshi.*" Since that date

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* The source when the mantra-sound is produced is not merely the vocal organs but the *idea* of the sound in the mind, the central force whence the mind and the breath, *i.e.*, intellectual and vegetative activities arise, the Self.

§ "The name Ramana or rather Ramani was the pet name given to the Swami (when he was a little boy) by Lakshmanier, an aged relation proficient in Telugu; but long ago it fell into desuetude, especially after the youth left Tiruchuzhi. The term *rishi* has been defined; and to prove the appropriateness of the name, the definitions are here given.

१. "ऊर्ध्वतास्तपस्युग्रो नियताशीच सम्यमी ।
शापानुग्रहयोश्शक्तः सत्यसंधो भवेदृषिः ॥

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this name has come into vogue among his devotees; and to Sastri must be given the credit for its currency. As Sastri considered the *Upadesa* he received from the Maharshi to be the result of Mother Sakti's *anugraha* (grace), he composed a thousand stanzas in her praise, and styled it "*Umasahasra*"; and in three weeks' time, he finished it. On the last night he sat up at the mango-tree cave with four amanuenses to whom he dictated verses, almost simultaneously. Two hundred or more of such *impromptu* verses were thus produced by him at one sitting, in the white heat of poetic inspiration, in about four hours' time, *i.e.*, between 8 p.m. and mid-night. He had then the inspiring presence of Ramana Maharshi.

In January, February and March, 1908, Maharshi and Ganapati Sastri spent three months at Pachaiamman Koil with a large number of others. Many also were the visitors. G. Seshayya and others cooked for the whole party. Another of Swami's devotees, Rangaswami Iyengar, bore the brunt of the expenses. Sastri went on touching up his "Umasahasra" and developing his *Dhyana* in accordance with Maharshi's directions. His main objective had not of course been abandoned. He still believed, like Confucius, that he had a lofty mission in life, and that he had adequate power to carry it out. Society in

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२. तपोनिर्धूतपाप्मानः यथातथ्याभिधायिनः ।
वेदवेदाङ्गतत्त्वज्ञा ऋषयः परिकीर्तिताः ॥

३. तपश्शौचपरादान्ताः सत्यवाचो बहुश्रुताः । वेदवेदाङ्ग etc.

४. ऐश्वर्यस्य समग्रस्य धर्मस्य यशसः श्रियः ।
ज्ञानवैराग्ययोश्चापि षण्णांवर्गो भगोमतः ॥

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India had yet to be revivified, and old yet bright ideas of the Vedic times resuscitated. New and deleterious growths, which impeded national life, had to be got rid of. And the entire panoply of heavenly forces (Sakti) had yet to be drawn down by Sastri himself and his associates and pupils who formed a *Sangha* (society) for developing Sakti mainly by *mantra japa* (holy incantations). When Sastri left Tiruvannamalai after March 1908, he asked for permission. At that time he asked Maharshi "Is the seeking of the source of the 'I' thought, sufficient for the accomplishment of all my aims, or is *Mantra Dhyana* needed?" Maharshi answered, "The former would suffice"; and when asked about the aim, added: "You had better throw the entire burden on the Lord (*Iswara*). He will carry all and you will be freed from the burdens. He will do His duty."

Kavyakanta G. Sastri frequently visited Tiruvannamalai and Maharshi in subsequent years. By this thorough mastery of the Sanskrit language, and the ease and excellence of his Sanskrit poetry, he must to some extent have influenced Maharshi who was always receiving ideas and language from persons and books almost unconsciously. The Swami, who began to learn Sanskrit from his perusal of Vivekachudamani with its Tamil verse translation, made very rapid progress and was able to compose a stanza in 1915, and Arunachala Pancharatna in 1917, and Upadesasara in 1927. The contact with Sastri was perhaps one of the elements in developing Maharshi's command of Sanskrit.

Sastri's chief service in connection with Ramana Maharshi is his eliciting (through his friends or directly) the replies of Maharshi to social and religious questions

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that constantly arise in the course of one's spiritual development. The first set of questions was put in December 1913 and the others in July and August 1917. He embodied in eighteen chapters of verse the answers to these questions which he named *Ramana Gita.*

Sastri was not a mere pandit learned in Sanskrit, but a bold critic too, especially in matters of age and authenticity of Sanskrit works. In caste and other matters of social institutions, the age of marriage, untouchability etc., he was quite modern. He has always been masterful, and seldom failed to impress those with whom he came in close contact with his own ideas and attitude. During 1922-29 he lived at Tiruvannamalai mostly with his family. He was always consulted by Maharshi on matters of importance, especially publications and other activities at the Asram.

Some visions to Ganapati Sastri (who appears to have had a good number of them in the course of his eventful life) of Ramana Maharshi may be set out here, as related by himself.

When Sastri was with Maharshi at Pachaiamman Koil in the beginning of 1908, something like a meteor appeared at dawn, and touched Maharshi's forehead, retreated, and came again and touched him six times.

The same year, Sastri went away to Tiruvottiyur near Madras for *Tapas.* There was a Ganesa temple near which Sastri performed his *tapas,* observing a vow of silence for eighteen days. On the eighteenth day, when he was lying wide awake, he saw the figure of Maharshi coming in and sitting next to him. Sastri sat up in won-

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der and tried to get up. But Maharshi pressed him down holding him by the head. This gave him something like an electric shock, which Sastri regarded as *Hastadiksha, i.e.,* as grace of the Guru conferred with his hand.

Ever since Maharshi arrived at Tiruvannamalai on 1—9—1896, he had not left that place and never in his life had seen Tiruvottiyur. But as Sastri narrated the above in his presence on 17—10—1929, Maharshi said :—

"One day some years ago I lay down, but I was not in *samadhi.* I suddenly felt my body carried up higher and higher till all objects disappeared and all around me was one vast mass of white light. Then suddenly the body descended and objects began to appear. I said to myself, evidently this is how Siddhas appear and disappear. The idea occurred to me that I was at Tiruvottiyur. I was on a high road which went along. On one side and some distance removed from it, was a Ganapati temple. I went in and talked, but what I said or did, I do not recollect. Suddenly I woke up and found myself lying in Virupaksha Cave. I mentioned this immediately to Palaniswami who was always with me."

Sastri found that Maharshi's description of the place at Tiruvottiyur exactly tallied with the Ganesa temple in which he carried on his *tapas.*

Ganapati Sastri with his colossal learning, remarkable genius and powerful personality, came to the young Swami (more or less of his own age) who had little knowledge of Sanskrit and who was rapidly absorbing impressions from the books and men he came across. Sastri and all the members of his family with the band

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(for he always had the knack of organisation) of his own disciples became the Swami's disciples and were very strongly attached to him. The Swami in turn had not merely great admiration for Sastri but was deeply interested in him and his extraordinary aims and aspirations, as also in his family concerns. The Swami occasionally submitted his own Sanskrit composition to Sastri for correction of grammatical or idiomatic errors, as he had never studied Sanskrit grammar but had picked up the language by the natural method of picking sentences and phrases from books and men.

Kavya Kanta Ganapati Sastri finally settled down about 1930 in the village of Nimpura near Kharagpur. *Tapas* was hereafter his sole occupation. His admirers looked after his few needs and a small Asram grew round him. He passed away on 25th of July 1936.

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CHAPTER XVI

M. V. RAMASWAMY IYER, ECHAMMAL, RAGHAVACHARI

यत्रोपरमते चित्तं निरुद्धं योगसेवया ।
यत्र चैवात्मनात्मानं पश्यन्नात्मनितुष्यति ॥
तं विद्यात् ॥

"Learn that yoga, by practising which the mind held within itself rejoices, the self seeing the Self, delights in the Self."

Bh. Gita VI. 20.

MANAVASI V. RAMASWAMY IYER was a P.W. Supervisor at Tiruvannamalai in March 1908. He had heard of Brahmana Swami on the hill, but found that people differed in their views about him. Anyhow he wished to visit the Swami and went with a companion, a fiddler, and returned, the fiddler telling him on the way back that the visit was a waste of time. A month later he went up with more faith and wisely, without a companion. Swami also was sitting alone in the Virupaksha cave. Ramaswami Iyer gives an account of this interview thus, in his diary :

"My soul was stirred ; and I appealed to him 'Sir, Jesus and other great souls came into the world to redeem sinners. Is there no hope for me ?' The Swami said (in English) * :—

* The words in bracket are not in the original diary but have been added by way of explanation.

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'THERE IS HOPE, YES. THERE IS HOPE.'

" These are the very words. With reluctance I came down, and the composition No. 1 was born.

எதுகுலகாம்போதி

பல்லவி

திக்குவேறில்லை-நீயேகதி-ஐயா, மெய்யா, தூயா, உனைவிட

அநுபல்லவி (திக்கு)

மொய்க்குமடியவர் வண்டினமாகியே கண்டு சுவைத்திடும்

சென்டு மணப்பூவே. (திக்கு)

(Thou art my sole refuge, I have naught else to turn to, Oh Sweet and Fragrant Bouquet of Flowers charming to the bees of the devotees swarming to Thy feet).

" From that time I began to frequent him. Once again I was with him one night, as it became a habit with me to sleep there every night when at headquarters. He was sitting calm ; and after half an hour or so he saw me ; and from him came into me a *burning current.*

" Previous to this when sitting under a tamarind tree, something entered into me which I could not then explain.

" Years later, it was found that the mind had entered inside. Then I felt something else entered my body, which was very pleasing."

" I was all along a dyspeptic and could not digest food nor sleep. I was worrying; and he (Swami) asked about it. I told him about my health. My head was hot. In about a minute, my whole brain felt a cooling sensa-

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tion. It so chanced that it was the eighteenth of Adi of Sowmya. A lady (devotee) brought in cakes and food for a feast. I was living on *Kanji* (gruel). Many invited me but I declined, saying 'I cannot digest.' But he pressed me, and so I had a good feast of very hard and rich food. That night, it was so very strange, I slept profoundly. This was a great impetus to me to rely on him more fully. My people who were averse to my going to the Swami, began to send my food to his presence, seeing my cure. Alas! I did not know him earlier. And so the above circumstances gave birth to composition No. 2.

காம்போதி

பல்லவி

பேருதவியை என்னென்று சொல்லலாகும், ஐயனினருள்

அநுபல்லவி தரு (பேரு)

ஆரும் அளி கிளி அணில்மயில் குரங்கிற்கும்
அழையாமலே யிரங்கும் விழைமன நிறைவே நின் (பேரு)

(The great aid graciously bestowed by thee, what am I to say of it? Even on bees, parrots, squirrels, peacocks, monkeys, thou hast showered thy mercy, unsought).

"Swami used to be very kind to these animals, and they were very free with him. Swamiji often gave us *Ribhu Gita* to read; and often *by his mere look*, the soul was stirred. I have heard people being blessed by the Guru holding his palm or feet on the head of the *chela*: but this look is more powerful.

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"Swamiji's Instruction is :

"Everything consists in not forgetting one's self and all misery is due to the forgetting of this self. I have come to the conclusion that when I forget my own self I have gone down ; and I am a beast. But when I am clear, 'I am,' there is no more bad nature.

"How happy I feel when once I question 'Who am I' and come by another stream to the brain. The very act of questioning is using will ; and so, the lesser the will-power, the lesser the happiness and *vice versa*. I am sure about this now."

Again on another date he notes in his diary how he conceived this process of self-realisation as taught by the Swami.

"The most important way to improve the brain is to stop thinking. Thinking and thinking is the cause of heated brain. When the brooding or thinking completely subsides, I am happy. To describe the state of feeling, then, will be vague—I feel 'me' or 'self'—which vanishes as soon as thinking begins."

This long extract from his diary has been given here to enable the reader to form his own idea of how the Swami's *Upadesa* (instruction) works in the field of spiritual experience with various people, as also in matters of mere physical health. The above cure of nervous insomnia and dyspepsia by the use of the will-power or the "I" current (as this disciple frequently terms it) is strikingly similar to the case of a lady * who was cured of the same diseases in very similar circumstances by

* This case is found in pp. 100-104 of *Varieties of Religious Experience* by W. James.

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following the advice of a mental healer who had told her that there was nothing but soul or mind, that the body was a myth or a product, at any rate, of the mind, that by remembering that she was the soul or mind which could not be diseased, she would be at once freed from her physical troubles.

Phenomena like those narrated above were by no means uncommon in the Swami's presence or in relation to him. Flashes of light, visions, apparitions and mental healing were occasionally experienced and reported by disciples to him. The Swami mostly remained silent or gave simple and natural explanations, always adding the advice or warning not to be unduly elated by or absorbed in such experiences; for after all, the grand aim of life is something different, *viz.*, the Self.

Lakshmiammal of Mandakolathur, known at the Ramanasram as Echammal is one of the oldest devotees of the Swami. She had very early in life drained the cup of bitterness to the dregs. Before she was twenty-five she lost her husband, then her only son, and finally her only daughter, in quick succession. Life became unendurable, and "the shocks so rudely given confused" *her* and "stunned *her* from *her* power to think, and all the knowledge of *her* self." Her village home, once so full of happy associations became, for that very reason, a veritable gloomy den which hurt her whichever side she turned, whatever she did or saw. Now "all the place was dark," for, all was dark where *they* were not, and "all the chambers emptied of delight,"—"because her brood was stolen away." She could not, for instance, open her window, for if she did, she would at once look on the school where her girl passed several happy years.

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of study. Consolations were of no avail. With her father's permission she travelled to Gokarnam in the Bombay Presidency to serve the holy sages of that place, so that, haply by their grace, her sorrows might be assuaged. In the north she met holy sages, but none of them could take the burden of sorrow off her back.

So in 1906, with a heart still aching, she returned to her village. Some of her friends and relations seeing that she wished to obtain the grace of great sages, reported to her that on the Tiruvannamalai hill was a young but holy saint who maintained silence and benefited many of those who approached him with faith ; and that if she but saw him she would never return. Echammal started at once for Tiruvannamalai. On reaching that place she avoided her relations, as their sight would revive her poignant grief for her lost ones. She went with a friend up the hill and saw the Swami. The Swami sat quiet and said nothing. She stood for an hour in his presence and said nothing at all. Yet though no words were exchanged—wonder of wonders ! she felt transfixed to the spot and could not think of leaving the Asram. Finally she somehow pulled herself away and returned to her friend's house at the foot of the hill, and informed her that somehow, by the grace of that Swami, the incubus of sorrow had been lifted from her heart.

She repeated her visits to the Asram day after day, and in a few days she could talk of her departed children and recall facts associated with them without being overwhelmed by tears, and without even a bitter pang in her heart. How did this dense cloud of sorrow, this whirlwind of grief give place to a comparative calm in her breast, she could not understand. It was all his grace,

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the kindness of the Swami on the hill. That was all she knew.

"I revere, I adore, I worship this Swami" was all she could say. Since then she daily prepared food for him and his visitors, carried it up to him wherever he might be, and after feeding him and them, reverently ate what remained. She found her Saviour and resolved never to leave him. All the moneys her father and, after his death, her brother sent or paid her for the last nearly forty years, were ungrudgingly devoted to the Swami and his Asram; she, of her penury, cast in all the living she had; and her house was the refuge for many devotees and visitors of the Swami. Her reward was a deep faith and mental peace. Any good or evil that befell her, she conveyed at once to the Swami who fully appreciated her devotion and sympathised with her as with the other devotees who had made him their sole refuge. (Echammal passed away in her beloved Thiruvannamalai on 27th Dec. 1945—Publisher).

With the Swami's concurrence, Echammal adopted a girl named Sellammal as her foster daughter, got her married, and even rejoiced in the birth of a tiny grandson whom she named "Ramana" after the Swami. But Providence * has always minimised the domestic blessings to this devotee. One day as she sat in her house at Tiruvannamalai, telegraphic news was suddenly conveyed to her from her son-in-law's village that Sellammal

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* In accordance with the declaration,

यस्यानुग्रहमिच्छामि तस्य सर्वं हराम्यहम् ।

"whenever I wish to bless any one, everything he calls his I snatch away from him."

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had died. Not having been informed of her previous illness this sudden stab made her gasp and seemed to reopen the old ocean of sorrow. But times had changed and she had a Saviour now ready at hand. So she ran up to the Swami and handed to him the telegram. As the Swami read it, he wept. Echammal went to attend the funeral and came back with the baby "Ramana," the only pledge of her departed daughter Sellammal, and placed him in the arms of the Swami, as the boy's sole refuge and her own for ever. Again the Swami burst into tears, realising as he did, how Echammal was still feeling the iron that had entered into her soul. Sorrow shared is sorrow lost. Her hopes having been anchored on the Swami, sorrow did not tear her up and carry her away as the first whirlwind had. The reward of her faith was the ease with which she recovered from shocks, and a subsequent deep mental peace.

As for her spiritual development, she was a firm believer in disinterested service as her sole means of salvation. She was formerly taught by a northern guru the art of concentration of thought, i.e., parts of Yoga. She even advanced therein so far as to fix her attention on her nose, and to remain for days in the contemplation of the blissful light that appeared before her vision. She would occasionally remain in contemplation for twenty-four hours or more consecutively, totally oblivious of her body, and without movement. When these occurrences were reported by others to the Swami, he kept quiet. Finally when she herself reported them to him, he dissuaded her from the practice. "Those objective lights you see are not your real goal. You should aim at realising your Self and nothing short of it." She consequently

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discontinued her blissful Yogic practice and though unable to reach immediately the goal set before her had infinite trust in the power of the Swami to save her and was always thinking of him. Such constant thought of the Swami leads to special spiritual experience—one of which may be set out here.

A Sastri from the North came to Tiruvannamalai to see the Swami. While he was talking with the Swami at Virupaksha cave, Echammal came up carrying food as usual. Her face showed much agitation and she was trembling. When asked what the matter was, she narrated what had just then happened. She was climbing up with the food, and had to pass by the Sadguru-swami cave. As she passed it, and looked down she saw two persons standing near her path. One of them was Ramana Maharshi and the other a stranger. She continued to climb up. As she went up a few steps higher, she heard a voice say "இங்கே இருக்கும்போது மேலே என்னத்துக்குப் போகிறது" which means "When one is (*i.e.*, I am) here, why go further up?" She turned to see the place where the figures had stood, but not a soul was there nor anywhere in the vicinity. This frightened her; and shivering and perspiring, she climbed up to the Swami's Asram. When Echammal gave this explanation, the Sastri became envious of her. "What, Swami!" said he, "while you profess to talk with me here, you show your form to this lady on the way. To me you do not deign to show any similar mark of your grace." When thus upbraided with partiality, the Swami had to defend himself and explain that Echammal's visions was due to her thinking of him constantly.

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Santammal of Ramnad is an elderly widow who heard of Maharshi a few years before, read his life, and began to worship his picture with great faith. She constantly thought of him in her waking moments, and saw him in her dreams. She would go to the Asram at Tiruvannamalai and serve him by cooking food morning, noon and evening. She began to see flashes of light in front of her eyes, whether closed or open, and the figure of Maharshi also appeared to her transfigured in bright white light even when she was away from Tiruvannamalai. She reported all these to Maharshi who promptly told her not to allow such phenomena to interfere with her main objective, *viz.*, the realisation of the Self. "ஒடுங்கவேண்டும்" "The mind must be stilled" was his insistent advice; and following it up she attained signal success in stilling her mind.

Experiences of this sort are by no means rare among the Swami's devotees who usually concentrate their minds on him; and the Swami gives the same warning, explanation or advice to all. In a few cases visions of devotees had special significance. Some of them are referred to in this and later chapters.

Raghavachariar, a T. R. S. Supervisor at Tiruvannamalai from 1910, paid occasional visits to the Swami. But whenever he went up, he found with him a crowd in whose presence he felt disinclined to speak. One day he went up with intent to submit three questions or requests. The questions, and what followed, are best given in Raghavachari's own words.

"The questions are :—

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1. Can you grant me a few minutes for private personal talk—free from the presence of others ?

2. I should like to have your opinion on the Theosophical Society of which I am a member.

3. Will you please enable me to see your real form if I am eligible to see it ?

"When I went and prostrated and sat, there was a crowd of thirty persons ; but they immediately dispersed. So I was alone with him and my first query was thus answered without my stating it. That struck me as noteworthy.

"Then he asked me of his own accord, if the book in my hand was Gita and if I was a member of the T. S. and remarked even before I answered his queries, 'It is doing good work.' I answered his questions in the affirmative.

"My second question also being thus anticipated, I waited with eager mind for the third. After half an hour, I opened my mouth and said 'Just as Arjuna wished to see the form of Sri Krishna and asked for *Darsan*,* I wish to have a darsan of your real form, if I am eligible'. He was then seated on the *pial* with a picture of Dakshinamurthy painted on the wall next to him. He silently gazed on as usual and I gazed into his eyes. Then his body and also the picture of Dakshinamurthy disappeared from my view. There was only empty space, without even a wall, before my eyes. Then followed a whitish cloud in the outline of the Maharshi and of Dakshina-

*i.e., a view of the universal form of Sri Krishna. See Ch. XI of the Bhagavad Gita.

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murthy, formed before my eyes. Gradually the outline (with silvery lines) of these figures appeared. Then eyes, nose, etc., other details were outlined in lightning-like lines. These gradually broadened till the whole figure of the Swami and Dakshinamurthy became ablaze with very strong and unendurable light. I closed my eyes in consequence. I waited a few minutes and then saw him and Dakshinamurthy in the usual form. I prostrated and came away. For a month thereafter I did not dare to go near him, so great was the impression the above experience made on me. After a month, I went up and saw him standing in front of the Skandasram. I told him 'I had a question put to you a month back, and I had this experience,' narrating the above experience to him. I requested him to explain it. Then after a pause he said, 'You wanted to see my form. You saw my disappearance. I am formless. So that experience might be the real truth. The further visions may be according to your own conceptions derived from the study of the Bhagavad Gita. But Ganapati Sastri had a similar experience and you may consult him.' I did not in fact consult Sastri. After this Maharshi told me to find out who the I was—the Seer or Thinker, and his place."

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CHAPTER XVII

F. H. HUMPHREYS AND THE SWAMI

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।
ईक्षते योगयुक्तात्मा सर्वत्रसमदर्शिनः ॥

"The Yogi by frequently practising concentration of mind sees God (Self) in all beings and all beings in God, and has thus the same or equally proper and appropriate attitude towards all."

Bhag. Gita. VI-29.

F. H. HUMPHREYS came to India for the first time in January 1911 to join the Police Department as an Assistant Superintendent. When he reached Bombay he was too ill to move on, and was detained in a hospital for about two months. On recovery he started off to Vellore for his training and reached that town on the 18th March 1911. S. Narasimhayya, a Telugu Munshi there, who was commissioned to teach him Telugu, began the first day with the alphabet. The pupil, however, evinced interest in things abstruse and asked for a book on astrology. The next day he asked his Munshi: "Do you know any Mahatma here?" People are rather reticent about the persons they revere, so Narasimhayya's answer was in the negative. The very next morning the pupil met the Munshi and said: "Munshi, you said yesterday that you did not know any Mahatma. I saw your Guru this morning in my sleep. He sat by my side. The first man in Vellore whom I

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met in Bombay was yourself." The Munshi protested that he had never visited Bombay ; but the pupil explained that during his stay at the Bombay hospital, he had directed his mind to Vellore, and in his astral body had seen the figure of the Munshi. The Munshi then placed several photographs of Great Men (*Mahatmas*) before his pupil, out of which the latter picked the photograph of Kavyakantha Ganapathi Sastri and said : "This is the likeness of your Guru. Is he not your preceptor? Tell me." The Munshi admitted the fact. The pupil again fell ill before a fortnight was over and went to Ootacamund for recovery. From there he wrote that he had seen a strange person with bright eyes, matted hair and a long beard, (some *Siddha* perhaps) and that he had wished to learn breath regulation (*Pranayama*). Later he wrote that he was considering how far abstinence from flesh-eating would be helpful to meditation, and whether he could join a mystic society, the members of which were privileged to converse with Mahatmas (*Siddhas*). Humphreys added that in a former birth he had been a member of that mystic society.

Humphreys only returned from the hill-station in November to take up his duties as Assistant Superintendent of Police and to recommence his studies under the genial Munshi. One day before commencing his daily lesson Humphreys took a pencil and paper and drew a picture of a mountain cave, with a figure like that of a sage standing at its entrance, while a small mountain stream flowed in front. Humphreys showed it to the Munshi and told him he had a vivid dream of this the previous night, and asked what it could mean. It occurred to Narasimhayya that the vision could be none other than

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that of Maharshi at the Virupaksha cave. He told this to his pupil and went on to describe the Sage's life of Supreme Realization. It was in this way that the young Englishman first came to know unaided the Sage of the Hill of the Holy Beacon.

Within a few days he had the opportunity to visit him. He was introduced to Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri for whom he conceived great veneration, and was taken by him in November 1911 to see Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai, where the Theosophical Society was holding a conference, which Sastri was to attend. The following is from a letter written by Humphreys telling of his first visit which was published later in the *International Psychic Gazette* :—

"Yesterday I got a day's leave and went with the Munshi to meet Sastriar.* Sastriar and Munshi are both disciples of the Maharshi. At two o'clock in the afternoon we went up the Hill to see him. On reaching the cave we sat before him, at his feet, and said nothing. We sat thus for a long time and I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour I looked into the Maharshi's eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realize somewhat that the body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost ; I could only feel that his body was not the man; it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting, motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically. My own feelings were indescribable.

"Sastriar then said I might speak. I asked for enlightenment, teaching. The Maharshi spoke and we

* Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri.

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listened. In a few sentences of broken English and in Telugu he conveyed worlds of meaning.

"The most touching sight was the number of tiny children up to about seven years of age, who climb the Hill, all on their own, to come and sit near the Maharshi, even though he may not speak a word nor even look at them for days together. They do not play, but just sit there quietly, in perfect contentment.

"The Maharshi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control and calm strength of conviction."

The following is the first conversation that took place between the Sage and Humphreys. The first question put by the Englishman was characteristic of youthful ambition and altruism :—

F. H. Humphreys : Master ! Can I help the world?

Ramana Maharshi : Help yourself and you will help the world.

H. : I wish to help the world. Shall I not be helpful ?

M. : Yes ! Helping yourself, you help the world. You are in the world—you are the world. You are not different from the world, nor is the world different from you.

After a pause,

H. : Master, can I perform miracles as Sri Krishna and Jesus did before ?

M. : Did any of them at the time of acting feel that he was acting and doing something inconsistent with the laws of nature ?

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H.: (After a while). No, Master.

The Master noticing his bent of mind and fearing his yielding to the charms of Thaumaturgy (Siddhi) showed him that the chief thing was to push on to the Highest, the Self, through absolute self-surrender (*Prapatti*), in the spirit which cries out:

"Our wills are ours, we know not how,
Our wills are ours to make them Thine."

The pupil felt the magnetic attraction of Maharshi and paid him two more visits. In the second visit he motored on his bicycle all the sixty miles of the dusty road from Vellore under a hot sun. Raghavachariar, the P. W. Superintendent, took him up to the Maharshi's cave. This time the late A. S. Krishnaswami Aiyar (then a District Munsiff), who happened to be present, acted as the interpreter.

This second visit may best be described in the words of the Englishman himself:

"I went by motor and climbed up to the cave. The Sage smiled when he saw me, but was not in the least surprised. We went in and before we sat down he asked me a private question, only known to himself and me. Evidently he recognised me the moment he saw me. Everyone who comes to him is an open book, and a single glance suffices to reveal to him its contents.

"'You have not yet had your food' he said; 'and are hungry.'

"I admitted that it was so. He immediately called a disciple to bring food, — rice, *ghee*, fruit etc., eaten with the fingers, as Indians do not use spoons. Though I have

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practised eating this way, I lack dexterity. So he gave me a cocoanut spoon to eat with, smiling and talking between whiles. You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile. I had cocoanut milk to drink, whitish, like cow's milk, and delicious to which he had himself added a few grains of sugar.

"When I finished, I was still hungry, and he knew it and ordered more. He knows everything, and when others pressed me to eat fruit when I had had enough he stopped them at once.

"I had to apologize for my way of drinking. He only said: "Never Mind." The Hindus are particular about this. They never sip or touch the vessel with their lips, but pour the liquid straight into the mouth. Thus many can drink from the same cup without fear of infection.

"Whilst I was eating he was relating my past history to others, and accurately too. Yet he had seen me but once before, and many hundreds in between. He simply turned, as it were, on clairvoyance, even as we refer to an encyclopaedia. I sat for about three hours listening to his teaching.

"Later on I was thirsty, for it had been a hot ride, but I would not have shown it for worlds. Yet he knew, and told a disciple to bring some lemonade.

"At last I had to go, so bowed, as we do, and went outside to put on my boots. He came outside too and said I might come to see him again.

"It is strange what a change it makes in one to have been in his presence!"

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F. H. Humphreys feared a conflict between his official duty and his spiritual practice, and questioned Maharshi about it.

F. H. Humphreys: Master! Lessons pass away quickly from my memory, I remember only the last word. What should I do?

Maharshi: You can attend to both your duty and your meditation.

Of the third visit which followed soon after, F. H. Humphreys has given no account, but presumably the teaching he derived from Maharshi which is set out, includes what he heard during his three visits.

F. H. Humphreys wrote an account of his visits and of the teachings to a lady in England, who published them in the International Psychic Gazette, and is given in the following chapter.

F. H. Humphreys retired from service some years later and became a Roman Catholic monk.

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CHAPTER XVIII

INSTRUCTIONS TO F. H. HUMPHREYS

विश्वंदर्पणदृश्यमाननगरीतुल्यं निजान्तर्गतं
पश्यन्नात्मनि मायया बहिरिवोऽदभूतं यथा निद्रया ।
यस्साक्षात्कुरुते प्रबोधसमये स्वात्मानमेवाद्वयं
तस्मै श्रीगुरुमूर्तये नम इदं श्रीदक्षिणामूर्तये ॥

Salutation to the feet of the Guru Sri Dakshinamurti, who sees within himself the entire universe, which resembles the image of a city in a mirror, which appears to be outside him just as objects seen in a dream are outside the dreamer, but which merges into himself in the state of Realisation—for then he sees the Self alone, just as the awakened dreamer sees himself alone and not the objects he dreamt.

A MASTER is one who has meditated solely on God, has flung his whole personality into the sea of God, and drowned and forgotten it there, till he becomes only the instrument of God; and when his mouth opens it speaks God's words without effort or forethought; and when he raises a hand, God flows again through that, to work a miracle.

Do not think too much of psychical phenomena and such things. Their number is legion; and once faith in the psychical thing is established in the heart of a seeker, such phenomena have done their work. Clairvoyance, clairaudience, and such things are not worth having, when

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so much far greater illumination and peace are possible without them than with them. The Master takes on these powers as a form of SELF-SACRIFICE!

The idea that a master is simply one who has attained power over the various occult senses by long practice and prayer or anything of the kind, is absolutely false. No Master ever cared a rap for occult powers, for he has no need for them in his daily life.

The phenomena we see, are curious and surprising—but the most marvellous of all we do not realise and that is that *one*, and only one, illimitable force is responsible for :—

(*a*) All the phenomena we see ; and

(*b*) The *act* of seeing them.

Do not fix your attention on all these changing things of life, death and phenomena. Do not think of even the actual act of seeing or perceiving them, but only of that which sees all these things—THAT WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE for it all. This will seem nearly impossible at first, but by degrees the result will be felt. It takes years of steady, daily practice, and that is how a Master is made. Give a quarter of an hour a day for this practice. Try to keep the mind unshakenly fixed on That which Sees. It is inside yourself. Do not expect to find that "That" is something DEFINITE on which the mind can be fixed easily : it will not be so. Though it takes years to find that "That", the results of this concentration will be seen in four or five months' time—in all sorts of UNCONSCIOUS clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round, yet always unconscious power.

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I have given you this teaching in the words same as the Master gives to intimate *chelas*. From now onwards, let your whole thought in meditation be not on the act of seeing, nor on what you see, but immovably on That which Sees.

ATTAINMENT

One gets no reward of Attainment. Then one understands that one does not *want* a reward. As Krishna says :— "Ye have the right to work, but not to the fruits thereof." Perfect attainment is simply worship, and worship is attainment.

If you sit down and realise that you think only by virtue of the one Life, and that the mind, animated by the one Life into the act of thinking is a part of the whole which is God, then you argue your mind out of existence as a separate entity ; and the result is that mind and body physically (so to speak) disappear ; and the only thing that remains is Be-ing, which is at once existence and non-existence and not explainable in words or ideas.

A Master cannot help being perpetually in this state with only this difference, that in some, to us, incomprehensible way, he can use the mind, body, and intellect too, without falling back into the delusion of having separate consciousness.

RELIGION

It is useless to speculate, useless to try and take a mental or intellectual grasp and work from that. That is only religion, a code for children and for social life, a guide to help us to avoid shocks, so that the inside fire may burn up the nonsense in us, and teach us, a little

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sooner, common sense, *i.e.*, a knowledge of the delusion of separateness.

Religion, whether it be Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Theosophy, or any other kind of "Ism" or "Sophy" or system, can only take us to the one point where all religions meet and no further.

GOD

That one point where all religions meet is the realisation—in no mystical sense, but in the most worldly and everyday sense, and the more worldly and everyday and practical the better,—of the fact that GOD IS EVERY THING, AND EVERY THING IS GOD.

From this point begins the work of the practice of this mental comprehension, and all it amounts to is the breaking of a habit. One has to cease calling things "things," and must call them God ; and instead of thinking them to be things, must know them to be God ; instead of imagining "existence" to be the only thing possible, one must realise that this (phenomenal) existence is only the creation of the mind, that "non-existence" is a necessary sequence if you are going to postulate "existence."

The knowledge of things only shows the existence of an organ to cognize. There are no sounds to the deaf, no sights for the blind, and the mind is merely an organ of conception or of appreciation of certain sides of God.

God is infinite, and therefore existence and non-existence are merely His counterparts. Not that I wish to say that God is made up of DEFINITE component parts. It is hard to be comprehensive when talking of God. True knowledge comes from within and not from without. And true knowledge is not "knowing" but "seeing."

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REALISATION

Realisation is nothing but seeing God literally. Our greatest mistake is that we think of God as acting symbolically and allegorically instead of practically and literally.

Take a piece of glass, paint colours and forms on it, and put the same into a magic lantern, turn on a little light, and the colours and the forms painted on the glass are reproduced on the screen. If that light were not turned on, you would not see the colours of the slide on the screen.

How are colours formed? By breaking up white light with a many-sided prism. So it is with a man's character. It is seen when the Light of Life (God) is shining through it, *i.e.*, in a man's actions. If the man is sleeping or dead, you do not see his character. Only when the Light of Life is animating the character, and causing it to act in a thousand different ways in response to its contact with this many-sided world, can you perceive a man's character. If white light had not been broken up and put into forms and shapes on our magic lantern slide, we should never have known that there was a piece of glass in front of the light, for the light would have shone clearly through. In a sense, that white light was marred, and had some of its clearness taken from it by having to shine through the colours on the glass.

So it is with an ordinary man. His mind is like the screen. On it shines light, dulled and changed because he has allowed the many-sided world to stand in the way of the Light (God) and break it up. He sees only the effects of the Light (God) instead of the Light (God)

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Himself, and his mind reflects the effects he sees just as the screen reflects the colours on the glass. Take away the prism and the colours vanish, absorbed back into the white light from whence they came. Take away the colours from the slide and the light shines clearly through. Take away from our sight the world of effects we see, and let us look only into the causes, and we shall see the Light (God).

A Master in meditation, though the eyes and ears be open, fixes his attention so firmly on "That Which Sees" that he neither sees nor hears, nor has any physical consciousness at all—nor mental either, but only spiritual.

We must take away the world, which causes our doubts, which clouds our mind, and the light of God will shine clearly through. How is the world taken away? When, for example, instead of seeing a man you see and say, "This is God animating a body," which body answers, more or less perfectly, to the directions of God, as a ship answers more or less perfectly to her helm.

SINS

What are sins? Why, for example, does a man drink too much? Because he hates the idea of being bound—bound by the incapacity to drink as much as he wishes. He is striving after liberty in every sin he commits. This striving after liberty is the first instinctive action of God in a man's mind. For God knows that he is not bound. Drinking too much does not give a man liberty, but then the man does not know that he is really seeking liberty. When he realises that, he sets about seeking the best way to obtain it.

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But the man only gains that liberty when he realises that he was never bound. The I, I, I's who feel so bound are really the illimitable Spirit. I am bound because I know nothing that I do not sense by one of the senses. Whereas I am all the time that which senses in every body, in every mind. These bodies and minds are only the tools of the "I," the illimitable Spirit.

What do I want with the tools who am the tools themselves, as the colours are the White Light?

Jesus, the man, was utterly unconscious* when he worked his miracles and spoke his wonderful words. It was White Light, the Life, which is the cause and effect, acting in perfect concert. "My father and I are one." Give up the idea of "I" and "Mine." Can the body possess anything? Can the mind possess anything? Lifeless tools are both, unless the Light of God be shining through. These things which we see and sense, are only the split-up colours of the One Illimitable Spirit.

WORSHIP

How can you best worship God? Why, by not trying to worship him (but) by giving up your WHOLE SELF to Him and showing that every thought, every action, is only a working of that one Life (God)—more or less perfect according as it is conscious or unconscious.*

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* i.e., 'unconscious of being a separate finite personality.'

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CHAPTER XIX

WITH RELATIVES AGAIN

का ते कान्ता कस्ते पुत्रः
संसारोय मतीव विचित्रः ।
कस्यत्वं कः कुत आयातः
तत्त्वं चिंतय तदिदं भ्रान्तः ॥

Who is a wife for you or a son? This World (*Samsara*) is exceedingly strange. Whose (son, etc.) are you? Who are you? And Whence? Bethink yourself of the Truth, the Reality in all this.

—*Sri Sankaracharya's Mohamudgara.*

पतिसुतान्वयभ्रातृवान्धवा
नतिविलङ्घ्य तेन्त्यच्युतागताः ।
गतिविदस्तवोद्गीतमोहिताः
कितवयोषितः कस्त्यजेन्निशि ॥

We (Gopi devotees) have come to you, O Krishna, abandoning husbands, children, brothers and other kinsmen, for we knew your track and were charmed by your sublime strains. Deceiver, who will desert women in the dark?

—*Gopika Gita in Srimad Bhagavata.*

ASCETIC sentiments like the above, proclaiming the hollowness of family and social ties, abound in religious and philosophic literature, especially in India. One also finds therein references to the importance of

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love and altruistic sentiments for social and individual progress. Are these teachings mutually conflicting, or is there any way of reconciling them ? Lives of great souls like Lord Buddha and Sri Krishna Chaitanya (Lord Gauranga) of olden days—as of Sri Ramana Maharshi and other saints of these days, prove that all these teachings are true, and that each has to be specially remembered and applied at the appropriate stage. When the young plant is just sprouting out of the seed or is yet weak and tender, it requires seclusion and the protection of a strong thorn fence to keep off cattle that else might devour it or trample upon and destroy it. But the same shoot, when developed into a good sized tree, dispenses with such protection and itself affords umbrage, sustenance and protection to cattle and men without detriment to itself. Often it is seen that a young aspirant compelled perpetually to stay with his kinsmen and friends, makes no progress at all, as they mock at all spirituality, their influence being totally chill and blighting. He must then get away from his associations and seek an environment favourable to spiritual growth, *e.g.*, the company of holy men, the joining of a sacred order, residence in an inspiring place among men whose views, ways and habits are elevating and unworldly. When he has sufficiently matured his detachment (*Vairagya*), when his faith in things unseen is strong enough to withstand all shocks from world contact, when his habits of thought and behaviour have become mature and firm, then he can safely move with his old companions in his former haunts. Then he will run his onward course along the paths of love and social duty, and exhibit specially the virtues of सर्वसमत्वं, सर्वहितत्वं and समचित्तवं *i.e.*, equality, universal beneficence and mental equipoise,

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which are said to be the chief distinguishing marks of an enlightened person (*Jnani*).

Soon after Nagaswami's return from Tiruvannamalai in 1900, he died. Nagasundaram, the younger brother of the Swami, had then little experience in matters spiritual or worldly. He was in his youth subject to fits of which he was relieved by God's grace as years passed. He had the rudiments of faith in Iswara, but had not made much progress beyond that. He was engaged later as a clerk in a temple. About 1902 he came up to see the Swami who was then at the lower cave known as Sadguruswami cave, still keeping his rule of silence. Nagasundaram embraced the Swami and wept aloud. The Swami was smiling all the while. The junior stayed awhile at the Asram and found that the Swami was above the ties of relationship. He offered to stay with him to serve and help him. As the latter did not agree, Nagasundaram went back to his place.

In succeeding years, Alagammal, the Swami's mother and other relations occasionally came to visit him. Once when she was on a pilgrimage to Benares she visited her son. Again at the beginning of 1914 she went up to the shrine of Venkatramanaswami at Tirupati and on her way back she halted at Tiruvannamalai, and stayed sometime with him at Virupaksha cave. Here she fell ill (of typhoid fever perhaps) and for two or three weeks underwent great suffering. The Swami does not mind any illness of his own, but is invariably kind and attentive to others' suffering. In the case of his mother he had a double debt to pay, *viz.*, as a unit of society, and the obligation to repay for her care of him in his earlier years. He attended on her with exemplary patience and

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diligence. In the course of the fever, as alarming symptoms appeared, he turned to his Tamil muse and composed these stanzas. *

1. Hill of my refuge that cures the ills of recurring births! O Lord! It is for Thee to cure my mother's fever.

2. O God that smitest Death itself! My sole refuge! Vouchsafe Thy grace unto my mother and shield her from Death. Who is Death if scrutinised?

3. Arunachala! Thou blazing fire of Wisdom! Deign to wrap my mother in Thy light and make her one with Thee. What need then for cremation?

4. Arunachala, that chasest away Illusion (Maya)! Why delayest Thou to dispel my mother's delirium! Beside Thee is there any one who, with maternal solicitude can protect the suppliant soul and ward off the blows of Destiny?

Alagammal recovered in due course and left Tiruvannamalai for Manamadura. There her domestic circumstances were not satisfactory. The family house at Tiruchuzhi had been sold to meet debts and necessary expenses. Her brother-in-law Nelliappier also passed away leaving the joint family in anything but affluence. About 1915 Nagasundaram's wife died leaving a little son. Alagammal, now fairly old and helpless, felt that she would be better off with her elder son, the Swami. His reputation was established and a large number of admirers

* The originals are in the Appendix.

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brought offerings, with which many of his dependants were being fed. In the beginning of 1916, Alagammal went to Tiruvannamalai, and lived for some days with Echammal. She desired to make her son's Asram her own abode. In this, she first encountered some opposition. Some of the devotees of the Swami feared that even the presence of his close relations in the town would make him run away from their neighbourhood, as he did in 1896. The overseer G. Sashayya entertained such fear and communicated it to the old lady, who was greatly agitated thereby. He forgot, however, that 1916 was not 1896. The position and circumstances of the Swami had entirely changed within those twenty years; and the maintenance of an aged and helpless mother may be a duty devolving even on a hermit. Encouraged by such considerations, Alagammal continued to stay in the town and in a very short time made Virupaksha and Skandasram, to which the Swami moved soon after her arrival her own permanent residence.

Nagasundaramier, the Swami's younger brother, soon arrived in the wake of his mother. That aged lady desired to have him also by her side in the closing period of her life, and sent an ardent devotee Narayana Reddiar to fetch him. So Nagasundaram joined his brother's Asram. At first he went to the town and begged food. But the abundant supplies of food at the Asram rendered this needless. He became one of the devotees of his brother and in due time donned *Kashayam* (*i.e.*, ochre-colored robes) and changed his name into Niranjanananda Swami. Alagammal, soon after her arrival at the Asram, started to cook food for herself, her sons and visitors; and this practice of cooking food at the Asram, then begun, con-

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tinues up to this day. It is no doubt consistent with the life of a Rishi to have a kitchen, but the ways of rishis have long been forgotten in the South, and this practice is more often identified with family life (*Grihastasrama*). Seshadriswami, with mild humour, once told a person who wished to go and see Ramanaswami, "Yes, go and see. There is a householder (*grihasta*) there. You will get sweet cakes (*laddu*) there." The point of the humour lies in the fact that the Swami was situated exactly like a *Grihasta,* with a house, relations, regular cooking etc. But all this was only in appearance. Maharshi was really little attached to these external objects, however trying their proximity might be. To the really strong man each fresh obstacle furnishes a fresh opportunity for overcoming it and strengthens his power of resistance. Alagammal was still apt to fancy that she had special attachment to her son and that he owed her similar attachment in return. To dispel this idea from all minds he at first adopted special measures ; for example, when Alagammal talked to him, he would not reply, though he would talk to Echammal and others. Alagammal complained of this treatment. Maharshi then told her that all women were mothers to him—not she alone. Alagammal for a time did not see the correctness of this attitude. The fact was that Maharshi was carrying out the very hard but important duty of removing worldly delusions from his mother and educating her in impartiality, detachment etc., *i.e.,* in spirituality. The old lady had some of the rudiments of religion, had gone to Benares and other holy places, and had got by heart with immense difficulty the Sanskrit slokas of Dakshinamoorthi Ashtakam and a few Tamil Vedantic poems. This was all her religious education. During the six years she

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spent with her son (1916-1922), she however picked up (through listening to his conversation and watching his conduct) all the important truths which he generally imparted to his devotees to prepare them for salvation. She thus began to see things in a new light. She assumed the *Kashaya* robe and dispassionately performed the rites of hospitality at the Asram. By a course of good work and holy company, the old tendencies (*vasanas*) were gradually removed. Then for two or three years towards her end she had attacks of illness, which also gave her increased strength of mind and prepared her for parting with life with ease. The Swami attended on her constantly with remarkable devotion, often losing sleep and rest at night right up to her end.

It was in Vykasi of Dundubhi corresponding to May 1922, that Alagammal's illness became serious. Medicines were administered and attention bestowed. The Swami was constantly at her bedside. On Vysakhabahula Navami the end appeared to be near. Whatever the Swami and his disciples could do had been done. Now Nature was taking her own course, and human effort had nothing more to achieve. So Maharshi, a masterhand at passive endurance, with stoic reliance on the Doctrine of Karma, * still performed his last offices, fully conscious that nothing could save the life that had reached its fated term. His only duty now was to soothe the mother's breast and give her such spiritual aid as her closing hours would permit her to receive. His right hand was on her heaving breast (heaving with *Urdhva Svasa*, the violent gasps that betoken the close of life) and his left was on

* Cf. *supra*, where he preached to his mother resignation to Fate.

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her head. To give her thoughts the proper turn *Ramanama Japa, i.e.,* God's name was loudly uttered by a group of disciples for some hours and parts of Vedas recited. In the midst of these holy recitals Alagammal left her body at about 8 P.M. on *Navami* (19th May, 1922).

During the day, as death appeared to be near, Maharshi and a few others did not care to eat. Just as the shades of evening were falling a meal had been prepared and the Swami, though invited, did not go in for this meal but asked others to take theirs. When at night the mother's spirit left its earthly tabernacle the Swami rose and, with a voice free from pain, said: "Hereafter we can eat. Come on; there is no pollution." He then took his meal along with some others.

The Swami seemed to feel no pain at all at the death of his mother; his feeling on the other hand seemed to be one of relief. This is what the disciple Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer notes in his diary;—

"Swamiji felt now so very jolly; all the night the brothers were singing (holy songs). Probably the mother's care was a heavy bond, and as she departed he felt more free. No need to stop at a fixed place. No need for being helped by others. No care. Free as a bird let off from a cage. I may be wrong. But I felt it to be so."

The idea of rejoicing at a mother's death on such grounds may jar upon some sensitive minds. So it is needful to observe that grief at, and fear of, death go together and are alike based upon a vague apprehension of harm upon one's entry into what the poet describes as "the undiscovered country from whose bourne no

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traveller returns"—harm, by reason of which "Some pious drops the closing eye requires."

If people in general, and spiritual aspirants in particular, develop the habit of seeing and speaking of things as they really are, so much the better. They have soaked themselves for years in delusion and have judged only by appearances. They should lose no time in taking to the new habit of seeing the naked truth face to face.

Maharshi had started this long ago—thirty-nine years before. To him death became a mere trifle, a mere वाचारंभणं नामधेयं—a mere name. What is death but a change of form, which calls for a fresh name? But as for the substance, does that change?

अच्छेद्योऽहमदाह्योऽहमक्लेद्योऽशोष्य एवच ।
नित्यस्सर्वगतः स्थाणुरचलोयं सनातनः ॥

I cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted nor parched. I am eternal, in all, firm and unshaken.

(*Bh. Gita II*—25 *adapted*).

The fact is: "Death and life are different aspects of one and the same event"—change. That which is beyond all change is the Real. The Real is the Absolute. Maharshi had realised the Absolute long ago and gone beyond finite entities. He did not lament and weep when monkeys and dogs died at the Asram; then why should he exhibit any grief when Alagammal died?

What happened to Alagammal after her death? What happens to a person after leaving this fleshy cage? This is the question put by Nachiketas to the God of Death (Kathopanishad) and by Jaratkarava Arthabhaga to

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Yajnavalkya in Janaka's sacrifice (Brihadaranyaka Upa. III 2 : 13). The answer is two-fold. From the *Vyavahara* standpoint it is Immediacy ; the soul goes on to other bodies—good souls to higher regions, middling souls back again to human society, and evil souls to lower forms of existence, like cruel beasts, or to still lower regions. The second answer is from the *Paramarthika* (the Absolute) standpoint which considers death as the result of *Mithyajnana* (illusion), a perception of difference or plurality (नानात्वं) which prevents the perception of the one Real ; and when one casts away such difference or plurality, death itself dies out and the Real is realised.

From either standpoint it must have fared well with Alagammal. She spent her closing years in performing good works and securing merit (*Punya*) and thereby eradicated her ingrained taints (*Vasanas*). Besides, Bhagavad Gita, VIII 6, says :—

यंयंवापिस्मरन्भावं त्यजत्यन्ते कळेबरं ।
तंतमेवैति कौन्तेय सदातद्भावभावितः ॥

" whatever a departing soul thinks of (constantly and) at the time it leaves this body, in that same form it is embodied in afterlife." To enable her to think of the Supreme in the form of Sri Rama at the point of her death, Swami's brother and others were loudly repeating *Rama Japa* (the holy name of Rama), and reciting holy verses, a practice all pious people interested in the dying persons should emulate. Even after her breathing had ceased (as even the scientists and doctors cannot fix the exact point which is termed death when the spirit is said to be hovering near the body and for sometime thereafter) they continued the recital of hymns in praise of God. So

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she left her earthly mould with only the highest thoughts. But by Bhagavan's grace and help in her last hours she became liberated. So sorrow for her was out of place.

At the ceremonies which followed the Swami seemed to be mostly a silent spectator. K. K. Ganapati Sastri came shortly before dawn from the mango-tree cave. The question had already been raised and discussed at night, whether the body should be cremated or interred. The Maharshi's answer in 1917 to the question about the remains of a woman-saint was in favour of burial; and so it was resolved to inter Alagammal's body. The previous evening relations had been wired to, some of whom turned up next morning. Meanwhile some of the disciples, acting as pall-bearers, carried the body across the Hill straight to the Palitirtham. However much the inmates of the Asram tried to avoid fuss over the burial, it got noised abroad. Very large crowds swarmed to honour the remains of the lady who had given birth to Brahmana Swami. In due form a pit was dug and the body placed therein. Heaps of holy ashes, salt, camphor, incense, etc., were thrown in to fill it up. Then masonry work was put over it with *a linga* on the top. From that time Alagammal (identified with Siva or "Matrubhuteswara") is daily worshipped in due form with *abhishekam* (bath), *naivedya* (food), camphor, and *ashtotharanamavali* (the recitation of 108 names of Siva), and a temple has been consecrated over her grave.

Let not people suppose that Maharshi has overcome all human feeling. Exactly the reverse is the case. By nature he is sympathetic; and since the great change of 1896 the grace or perfection of "charity" has coloured all his acts and permeated his very being. Many instances

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of his sympathy have been noted. Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer notes in his diary that Maharshi took a delight in helping him to fix the auspicious date and hour for his daughter's wedding; his sympathy with Echammal in her calamities has already been recorded.

Recently K. S. Seshagiri Iyer, a Mylapore teacher, his wife and children came and stayed with Maharshi for a few days and enjoyed their stay as they loved Maharshi deeply. When the young lady came to take leave to go back to Mylapore tears choked all utterance and she could only sob. Maharshi was equally moved to tears. But in a minute he corrected his attitude and said: "Why should you not think that you are going to Arunachalam?"*

A question may be considered at this stage about the relation of emotion to illumination, of devotion (*Bhakti*) to Realisation (*Jnana*). Even about the time of Maharshi's leaving Madura, he would remain at times absorbed in the Self, lost in *Samadhi*, and at times visit the temple and pour out his soul in tears. These tears of devotional fervour continue to flow even today when occasions for them arise; *e.g.*, listening to devotional songs or soul-stirring music, etc. Maharshi, explaining these facts, says that devotion (*Bhakti*) and Realisation (*Jnana*) are the same and not different. In Chapter XIII of Bhagavad Gita the description of the latter term includes the former; the Gitacharya includes processes leading to Jnana in the term Bhakti. The steps leading to the terrace are seen by one who reaches the

* i.e., Tiruvannamalai. He means "If you strenuously think I am at Mylapore in your house, you can feel my presence here."

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terrace (to use Sri Ramakrishna's illustration) to be the same as the terrace. In the devotional path one starts by dwelling intently on the Personal God whom one worships and proceeds till one loses oneself or merges in Him. In the path of Inquiry one starts by dwelling on oneself, which one loves most, and proceeds till one loses oneself or merges in That. In both cases, Emotion or Personality characterizes the beginning ; and the end, in both cases, is without characteristics and indescribable except in negative terms, as beyond Emotion, Thought, Will and Personality.

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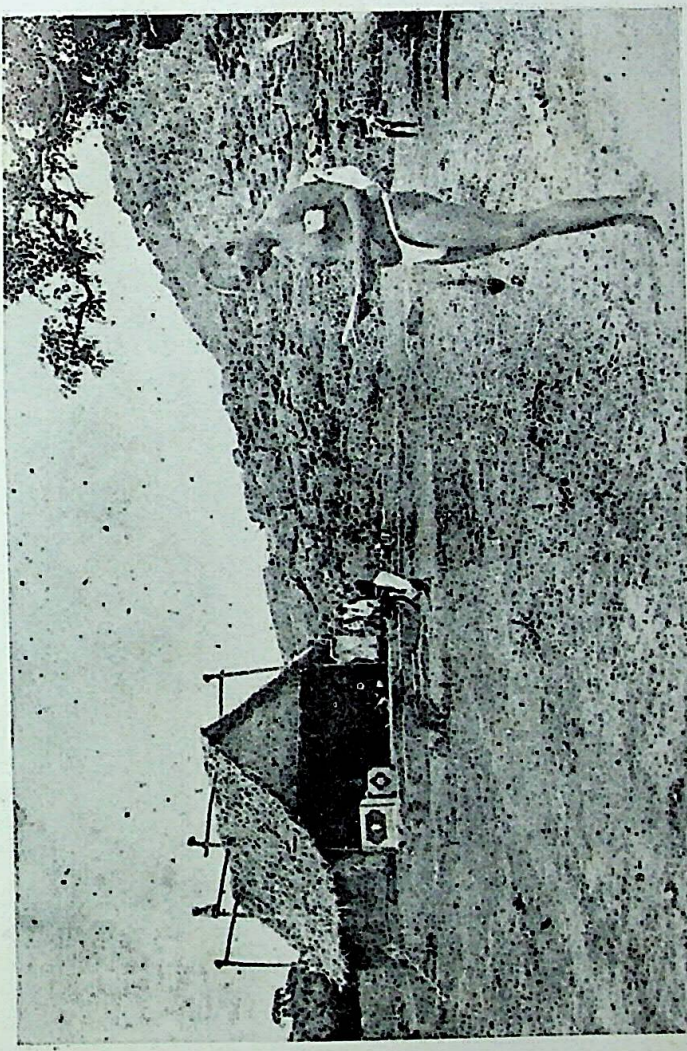

First Ashramam hut at the foot of the Hill.

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Kavyakanta Ganapathi Muni.

Sri Seshadri Swami.

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CHAPTER XX

RAMANA MAHARSHI AND SESHADRISWAMI

विद्वानेव विजानाति विद्वज्जनपरिश्रमम् ।

The wise alone can appreciate the labours of the wise.

TIRUVANNAMALAI, it was often said, had two eyes by which the town was sanctified—Seshadriswami and Ramana Maharshi. The former left his body on 14th January, 1929; and the extent of his popularity or influence was seen by the spontaneous concourse of crowds that came in their thousands to honour his remains. The living Swami is similarly honoured especially on the occasion of festivals like the Kartikai. It will be appropriate to note the points of contact between the two and the few striking features of similarity or difference between them in attitude and behaviour.

Seshadriswami was an Ashtasahasram Brahmin born in 1870 at Vazhur (Wandiwash Taluk of the North Arcot District) and brought up by his mother's uncle, the devout and learned scholar and Pouranika Kamakoti Sâstriar, from whom (mainly through his mother Marakatammal) he derived his proficiency in, and attachment to, vocal music and Puranic lore, especially the national epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. He had a very plastic and retentive memory. At the early age of fourteen he

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had sufficiently mastered the chief books in Sanskrit literature, and could express his thoughts in Sanskrit with ease. He was always serious, and had intense devotion to the Goddess Kamakshi at Conjeevaram, where he lived with his father in the ancestral home. Reciting five hundred stanzas in Her praise (*Mukapanchasati*), he went round Her shrine day and night. When he was about seventeen he was initiated into Sakti (or Bala) Mantra, and carried on spiritual practices at dead of night alone in a burial-ground adjoining a river and in the shrine of his family deity Periandavar. He appears to have had a vision of the Goddess Sakti and to have been deeply influenced thereby. He quickly lost all touch with domestic concerns and study, and took to wandering and performing *Japa* of various *mantras* with deep concentration. He often spent whole nights in meditation. He was however treated roughly by all about him: so he left the place, and tried one place after another. His choice fell on Tiruvannamalai where he went in about 1890. His relations came here to recall him to Conjeevaram, but in vain. He stuck to Tiruvannamalai with hardly any break for about thirty-nine years. At the outset he roamed there apparently without aim, but aiming all the while at completing his *Vairagya* (detachment) and *Mantrajapa*. His tapas matured in about ten years and developed in him psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance and prophecy.

The virtuous alone are capable of lasting friendship, says Epictetus. Those attached to the world are drawn away from their friends, and hate sometimes replaces love. Two unattached souls like Ramana Maharshi and Seshadri Swami might well be expected to be friends, and

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permanent friends too. The expectation is fully borne out by the facts.

They had many points in common. Both were Brahmin bachelors who attained *vairagya* and left their homes at the age of seventeen or nineteen (just the critical period of maturity). Each had lost his father at an early age. Both were keenly intelligent and had retentive memories. Both were natives of places far away from Tiruvannamalai, but from an early age both were deeply devoted to its Lord, Arunachala. Both were orthodox till they left home ; but soon after their arrival at Tiruvannamalai both gave up caste prejudices in matter of food, etc. In fact both were sustained mainly on non-Brahmin but vegetarian food. Both stuck to their new abode with determination.

Seshadri was the earlier arrival. He was highly learned. He had composed Sanskrit verses and had a good command of the Vedas, Pancha Kavyas, grammar, prosody and Jyotisha, and was an excellent singer with a good knowledge of the theory of music. In all this the younger Swami was his antipodes. Seshadri had been treated as slightly "off his mind", with perhaps some reason. In fact from his eighteenth year wherever he went he was regarded by many as slightly insane ; and he often put on the cloak of insanity when he wished to avoid the rush and requests of many. Brahmana Swami never showed signs of insanity, nor posed as insane, but observed silence which served equally well to keep off curiosity hunters and troublesome crowds.

Seshadri found that the new arrival, Brahmana Swami, was a soul of rare worth who had transcended

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sense attraction, withdrawn his senses from external objects, and was constantly absorbed in *Samadhi*; so Seshadri tried to extend what help he could to the junior to save him from the pest of stone-flinging and pot-hurling lads. He met the junior again at Pavazhakunru and occasionally shared with him the food offered by the mutt at the foot of the hill and by visitors. When the junior moved to the hill, Seshadri went up to see him and occasionally messed with him. He endeavoured to be unobtrusive in most of his activities; and his purpose, if any, was mostly undiscoverable. On some occasions, however, his aims were patent or expressed. Keenly grateful by nature, he tried to benefit his benefactors, those who gave him food or shelter. One Subrahmanya Mudali of Tiruvalur, his mother, Alankarattammal, and wife, Kamakshiammal, were spending their time, attention and wealth mostly on feeding sadhus since 1908. For thirty years they carried meals for Maharshi and those with him, and they fed Seshadri whenever they could find him. True to his salt the latter tried to wean Mudali from his worldly activities and turn him inward and God-ward. So Seshadri went uphill and told the Mudali, "You see, (my) younger brother has a salary of Rs. ten thousand; I have a salary of one thousand rupees; why should you not try and secure a salary of a hundred at least?" Mudali discovered that by 'salary' Seshadri was referring to spiritual attainment, and by "younger brother" to Maharshi; but he was deeply involved in his agrarian litigation, with the hope of acquiring more land and growing richer. So he answered, "I have no time, Swami; I have my litigation and troubles to attend to." Seshadri repeatedly pressed him and "rebuked each dull delay," pointing out that the science

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of the Self was very easy to learn and that by neglecting it Mudali was incurring "*Brahma Hatya,*" the mortal sin of slaying a Brahmana. Mudali was frightened and went to Maharshi in whom he had more faith, and reported this remark. "Yes," replied Maharshi. "You can be said to commit the murder of Brahman by not knowing that you are Brahman."'

Seshadri generally kept most people from approaching him. If, however, they were devotees of "Ramanaswami", as he called the Maharshi, he discovered the fact at once by his thought-reading and gave them the needed help or at least a kind reply.

Echammal, who daily fed Maharshi and his visitors, also fed Seshadri as often as he went to her house. Whenever the latter met her returning home in the evening he would inquire whether she had given Ramanaswami his meals, and escort her to her house. He was as a rule quite disinclined to give advice on matters spiritual; but as in the case of the above Mudali, he made an exception in her case also. When she asked "What are the *Mahavakyas* (the Grand Utterances) and what is their import?" he lectured for hours without reference to any book on that subject and made the people of Echammal's house wonder at the depth of his learning and spiritual insight. Again when she was at her worship, he dropped in one day and asked her what she was adoring. "Only your portrait and Ramanaswami's" was her reply. "Why do you not practise *Dhyana* (meditation)?" he asked. Though Echammal had already been taught meditation by a Guru and could spend a day or two in ecstatic trance with total loss of consciousness, she wished to get further

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instruction from this eminent saint and asked him how *Dhyana* was performed. He sat down at once bolt upright in the middle of her small apartment with legs folded over each other and, keeping a level gaze, sank into *Samadhi* in which he remained absorbed for four or five hours; in the end he rose and said: "Do you see, Echammal?" He taught her many a truth, consoled her and fortified her mind when she lost her foster child, Sellammal.

Seshadri always advised people to stick to the particular path they had chosen for spiritual development. He was an adept in Mantra Sastra, and by constant repetition of *mantras*, with due observance of the required conditions, had obtained a vision (*Darsan*) of his Goddess Kamakshi, Sakti, or Bala. He had practised numerous other *mantras* also and from his quiver he could pull out the particular *mantra* suitable to the particular person who approached him for initiation. When he found that those who approached him had already faith in Ramanaswami he would direct them to stick to him to the last, and not infrequently on such occasions he would either identify himself with Ramanaswami or point out that there was really no difference in serving either of the two.

Lakshmiammal (of Tiruchuzhi) had first visited Tiruvannamalai fifteen years previously, stayed with Echammal, and spent an entire week in serving Ramana Maharshi. At the end of the week she remarked to Echammal, "I have stayed a week and not yet seen Seshadriswami." The next day as she was going through the temple on her way to Ramanasramam on the hill she

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found Seshadri (with whom it was child's play to read the thoughts of people, near or remote, and to avoid, or appear before, them just as he thought fit) at the temple, bowed before him, and thought within herself that she was not blessed enough to serve him. In reply to her unuttered thought he remarked: இங்கே என்ரூல் என்ன. அங்கே என்ரூல் என்ன? "What does it matter whether here (you serve me) or there (you serve Ramana-swami)." Though he often avoided gifts of food, he would drop in off and on at the *mantapam* in the Arunachala temple where several disciples of Maharshi lived and begged their food and, after remarking: "I suppose there are no others here (*i.e.*, other than disciples of Maharshi), he would sit at a plate and fall to his food. At other places he would scatter food from his plate; and if his host remarked, "Swami, this is *Bhikshanna* (begged food); so no food should be thrown away," he would reply: "You see, I am not scattering any."

About 1914 he regularly visited the Virupaksha cave for some weeks and shared the food with Maharshi. One day however, Kandaswami, the latter's attendant, found fault with him for scattering food and remarked "If you do this I will not give you any more food." Seshadri who was very sensitive in such matters never again went up the hill to share Maharshi's food. On this Palaniswami once remarked, "Ha! Seshadri is not a wise man, not a *Jnani*. He scattered food and when we expostulated with him, he never came up again for food at the Asram." Seshadri never cared for good or evil report. But when Palaniswami's remark was mentioned to him, as it concerned his conduct towards Ramanasram, he defended his action by observing that one should not eat all the food

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placed before one, being surrounded by other (persumably hungry) creatures, and quoted* from *Sraddha* and other *Mantras* to show that *elementals, spirits, Yakshas, Rakshasas,* etc., were found everywhere.

Somasundaraswami, a disciple of Maharshi, left him for a time, and was wavering in his mind as to whom he was to go for further guidance. So one night he waited for Seshadri at the temple. As soon as he came he looked at Somasundara, read his thoughts, and asked him to "go to Ramana"; and when Somasundara still hesitated and waited, Seshadri said more emphatically still, "Go, go, go to Ramana. Do not stop here." So Somasundara started off immediately and went up to Ramanaswami in the dead of night.

A Sastri of Chidambaram, who was often visiting Maharshi and serving in the Asram, was one night at the above temple. To assist his spiritual soarings, he occasionally resorted to the use of the intoxicant drug ganja (*cannabis indica*). Unfortunately on this occasion, the drug used had evidently not been purified. Poor Sastri was therefore distressed to find that instead of making him spiritual, the drug had made him more carnal, for carnal thoughts now flooded his brain. Not knowing what to do, he went and prostrated before Seshadri who at once saw how matters stood, and remarked: "I told you already not to use this drug, yet you have used it." Now Seshadri had never given him that advice, but Maharshi had. So Sastri discovered that Seshadri was identifying himself with Maharshi.

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* अपगच्छन्तु ते भूता ये भूता भुवि संस्थिताः ॥
आगमार्थंतु देवानां गमनार्थं तु रक्षसाम् ॥

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When a contractor (A. V. Iyer) stood before Seshadri thinking of visiting Maharshi, Seshadri encouraged him by saying "மஹர்ஷிகள் தர்சனம் பரம பாவனம்" "Seeing Maharshi thoroughly cleanses the mind from sin."

A very interesting scene between these two spiritual giants (Maharshi and Seshadri) was witnessed in 1908 by Vasudeva Sastri, a disciple of Maharshi. Seshadri came up to the mango-tree cave where Maharshi was and sat gazing at him. A minute generally sufficed to enable him to read the thoughts and nature of any individual. But after long gazing at Maharshi, he pointed to Maharshi and remarked :—"இது என்ன நினைக்கிறதோ தெரியவில்லையே." "It is not clear what this person is thinking."

Maharshi however kept silent. Then Seshadri expressing his own view, said : "If one worships God Arunachala, He will grant salvation."

Maharshi : "Who is the person who worships and who the worshipped ?"

Seshadri breaking into a loud laugh said, "That is just what is not clear."

Then Maharshi expounded for about an hour the Advaitic realisation of Unity—of everything including God, the world and the individual souls. Seshadri patiently and quietly listened and at the end got up and said : "I cannot say ; all that is dark to me. I at any rate worship." So saying he faced the crest of the hill Arunachala, then prostrated himself ten or fifteen times and went down. He was then evidently keen on maintaining a personality distinct from God as the very foundation of his worship.

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But it would not be correct to suppose that Seshadriswami never cared for Advaitic realisation. He had on the other hand expressed that state pithily several times (after 1908) to Ramana's devotees. Once Echammal was getting Bhagavad Gita interpreted to her by a learned pandit at her house. Seshadri dropped in at the time. The pandit puffed with the pride of learning, pointed to him and remarked concerning the difference between book knowledge and realisation of the Self, *Jnana*: "See this person: not even for seven more generations can he attain Jnana." Seshadri put up with the impertinence, stayed awhile, and departed remarking: "When you taste food if you see who* it is that tastes, then you have known Him (Brahman)."

Once C. Narayanaswami found Seshadriswami near an Iyer's house in the Agraharam looking at a buffalo. The Iyer asked the Swami, "What is Swami looking at?" Seshadri answered: "I am looking at this." Iyer then asked, "Is it the buffalo Swami is looking at?" Then Seshadri turned to C. N. and asked him (pointing to the buffalo): "Say what this is." C. N. replied "It is a buffalo."

"எருமையா? எருமையா? எருமை! ப்ரஹ்மம் என்று சொல்" "Is it a buffalo, a buffalo? (you) Buffalo! call it Brahman," was Seshadri's remark as he left the place.

His advice to Natanananda when he tried to approach Maharshi is given in a later chapter.

The high regard Seshadriswami had for, and his occasional identifying himself with, Ramana Maharshi,

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* *i.e.*, if one analyses one's self and learns the *real* basis of it.

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explain a curious observation which he once made to a clerk, T. V. Iyer, who was deeply attached to him and in whom he took much interest. Iyer regarded Maharshi also in the light of a Guru. Once when Iyer was alone with Seshadri the latter evidently further to develop Iyer's faith in his Guru (*Gurubhakti*) which is absolutely essential for spiritual progress, asked him: "Do you know there are three *lingas* (embodiments or visible representations) of God here (*i.e.*, at Tiruvannamalai)?"

Iyer: I do not know three. One Linga is the Hill, I know only that.

Seshadri: No, no; you know all the three.

Iyer: No, Swami, pray tell me what the other two are.

Seshadri: But you know them.

Iyer: No, Swami.

Seshadri: One *linga* they call Ramanaswami.

Iyer: Yes, Swami; now I know the second. Pray which is the third?

Seshadri: You know it too.

Iyer: No, Swami; I do not.

Seshadri: The third *linga* they call Seshadri.

Iyer: That is you, Swami; is it not?

Seshadri: You know it.

Iyer: I did not.

Seshadri: Yes, it is I.

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Before closing this narrative, the affectionate relations between the two Swamis may be illustrated by reference to a dream. Students of psycho-analysis know that one's inmost thoughts are often brought to the surface in dreams. Maharshi related in March 1930 to his disciples that he had, a few days previously, met Seshadriswami in a dream. Seshadri (of the dream) was having a shave. Maharshi went up and patted him on the back, saying "Hallo." Seshadri looked up and, finding that it was Maharshi got up and held him fast in embrace for many minutes.

At the death of Seshadri, Maharshi spent an hour at his funeral witnessing the formalities of the saintly interment amidst a crowd of thousands of people and added to the impressiveness and sanctity of the proceedings by his presence.

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CHAPTER XXI

A ROBBERY AT THE ASRAM

"Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

ONE of the best tests of true asceticism and of the soundness of altruistic institutions, is the way in which wealth and its problems are faced. Wealth stands for all comforts of the flesh and vanities of the soul, as almost everything—from sense enjoyments to "incense kindled at the Muse's flame,"—can be had for money. Asceticism and altruism involve the deliberate rejection of vanities and enjoyments; hence the injunction to flee wealth and to cherish "holy poverty".

Prophets have declaimed against the love of riches as the root of all evil, and warned the rich that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God", that they should lay up treasures for themselves "in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal," and that they cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time.

Easy as it is to declaim, denounce, or preach, it is hard to judge as to when, how and how far, wealth is to

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be avoided, acquired or retained. A hermit sworn to "holy poverty" sometimes overdoes his vow and thereby ruins his body and mind; or treats it as a counsel of perfection only, helps himself with the excuse that the flesh is weak and is termed a hypocrite. "Holy poverty" indeed! Poverty comes like an unbidden and unwelcome guest, with freezing looks to rob people of, and intensify their longing for, the comforts and necessaries of life, making existence itself a burden and holiness almost impossible. The few that steel their hearts at first to endure, and finally, to embrace her, are doubtless holy. But such holiness is so rare and precious that fame and wealth soon spot it out and besiege it. Poverty then flies away, and with it not infrequently holiness too. What an unstable compound is this "holy poverty"—poverty chasing away holiness, and holiness poverty!

Maharshi, having from the beginning led an absolutely pure and unattached life, was never left in want. Food was all he needed, and Providence gave him enough and to spare. But from the time that dependents began to look up to him or his Asram for their requirements a social or economic problem arose which was solved at different times with varying success. The dependents, who begged food for themselves and for the Swami, did not raise any difficulties. But as his fame for *Vairagya* (dislike of wealth, etc.) and for self-abnegation spread, food, nay luxuries, poured upon him—such are the ways of Dame Fortune, who dogs the heels that spurn her. The question arose as to how this inflow of wealth should be used. The Swami had no hesitation about himself. When at Gurumurtam, admiring people brought sundry eatables in the afternoon or evening, they found him on his stool

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in a corner with eyes closed; and they were promptly told by Palaniswami (who was then in attendance) that till noon of the following day, the Swami would not open his eyes, much less eat anything; and the visitors would themselves distribute what they had brought amongst those present. But when the Swami was on the hill leading a more social life, offerings flowed; and what was he to do with them? He never hesitated in applying the golden rule of "share and share alike." He never cared to accept anything in which those present could not share. If eatables were brought, he picked a little off the plate and the rest was immediately distributed. Even if the articles presented were costly fruits or other rarities, the same rule was applied. Loving presents worth ten or twenty rupees would be brought by deeply devoted admirers and in a few minutes the whole would disappear down the throats of all present. As a rule, nothing was reserved for a later occasion or for the Swami's exclusive use. This solution of the problem increased his popularity and spread the fame of his sense of equality (*Samatva*) and indifference to wealth, which in turn increased the flow of presents, but kept the Asram really poor. Money he never touched since he threw away his three rupees and a half on his arrival at Tiruvannamalai. One would suppose that Maharshi at any rate had successfully dealt with problems of wealth and poverty, even in the midst of his dependents and visitors. But nothing on earth is perfect; the general success of poverty at the Asram proved to have exceptions, which may be illustrated by what follows.

The wealth, Rs. 100 of Uddandi Nainar, that the Swami had rejected, was left with G. Seshier for the

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Swami's use or of such use as Swami would approve. This is the way that wealth from time to time attached itself to the Swami and his Asram, always bringing with it cares, troubles and endless problems which he has solved by cutting the Gordian knot. When he was in the mango-tree cave subscriptions of several hundred rupees were raised and expended on improving the buildings; but shortly after the improvement, he left the cave and moved to another—the Skandasram. There again money was freely raised and expended on building a neat masonry cottage and a good garden. Then questions of right and claims of "*meum*" and "*tuum*" sprang up among some dependents, and the result was an unhappy rift in the lute, which marred the harmony of the Asram. When he left that Asram for the hut near his mother's tomb at the Pali-tirtham, wealth flowed in again; and decent rooms with a luxuriant garden rose. The Swami never cared for these and never wanted possessions; but they came, and the world always associated him with them. When, on various occasions, devotees gave freely money or food, a large number of people were constantly fed: even on an ordinary day it mounted to fifty or more. A sudden inflow of half a dozen or even a dozen guests was not difficult to feed as money or articles were always some-how received. In fact very little remained after expen-diture to be kept over as a reserve. But beggars, and others carried away the impression that the Asram was a rich institution. Many went there for a nice dinner, as none was sent away without a regular course of meal with the Swami, or at least the doles of food distributed to the poor outside the dinner-hall before the Swami's meal. Many people thought the Asram "fair game" for

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them to secure what they wanted out of its overflowing charity. A few daring spirits also came up occasionally, and tried to employ moral or criminal pressure to get wealth out of the Swami or his Asram.

A few years ago, a young rotund and well-fed person dropped into the Asram. As no one is kept out, and as the Swami is available to all comers at any hour without announcement or permission, he went up, bowed, and sat before the Swami. He opened fire straightaway with the question (in English) to the Swami, "You have realised God, I hope?" The question in the circumstance was warranted neither by English nor by Indian etiquette towards Swamis. The Swami kept silent. The visitor waited awhile and, unabashed by the failure of his first attempt, cast a look on the tiger-skin on which the Swami was sitting (and which had been probably accepted as a present from a disciple) and tried his second squib: "Is it sin, Swamiji, to kill tiger?", he asked, regardless of good manners and of grammar alike. This also failed to explode. The Swami kept silent, noting at once that the visitor was anxious to draw him into a controversy and to impale him on the horns of a dilemma. The visitor evidently sought to force the Swami to say that killing animals is no sin or to admit abetment of the sin after the fact. Some one present tried to explain to the visitor that blank general doctrines would not do, and that the answer might depend upon special circumstances. But before the explanation was fully offered, the visitor pertly remarked "I did not question you please, I want the Swami alone to answer." So there was perfect silence for ten or fifteen minutes, after which the visitor left the hall.

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When the visitor was questioned by one of the inmates as to how he maintained himself, he frankly admitted that he lived upon the finances of the rich mutts upon which he would now and then sponge. The visitor asked next : "Is this Swamiji rich ?" The extensive garden and the tiled hall were responsible for his attempt to squeeze some money out of the Asram. Discomfited in his attempt at extortion and discovering perhaps that he had lighted upon a Swami with but an illusory wealth, the visitor left the place, obtaining only a meal or two at its expense.

If this visitor attempted to gain something from the Asram by what may be termed civil extortion, others who shared the illusion that Maharshi was a rich Swami did not stop with civil means. Twice in 1924, during the summer months, thieves entered the Asram at night to carry off what they could. On the first occasion they entered the Samadhi of his mother by opening a hole in the wall, and carried off a few things unnoticed. A week later a more daring feat was accomplished by three robbers. A brief account of it may serve to show how the appearance of wealth is fraught with evil consequences, however perfectly Maharshi carries out the principles of indifference to wealth and even to his body ; and how calm, self-possessed, scrupulous and altruistic he is, even in the most trying circumstances.

It was a dark summer night about 11-30 P.M. on 26th June, 1924. Maharshi had retired to rest as usual on the dais in the long thatched hall in front of his mother's Samadhi. Four disciples were resting near various windows in the hall. After mid-night two of them, Kunjuswami and Mastan, heard the loud remark of some

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persons outside—the thieves—"There are six persons lying inside." Mastan shouted "Who is it?" The thieves replied by smashing the glass panes of a window: their evident intention being to strike terror in the minds of the inmates. Kunju and Mastan left their beds near that window and came near Maharshi's dais as a safer place of retreat. The thieves then ran up and smashed the window near Maharshi who merely sat in silence. Kunju then opened the northern door of the hall and brought Ramakrishna (another disciple) from an adjoining hut for help. Meanwhile through the open door, the two dogs of the Asram, Karuppan and Jack, issued out, but the thieves beat them mercilessly. The sickly Karuppan howled and ran in immediately, while Jack ran away. When Kunju returned to the hall, he and Maharshi told the thieves that there was very little for them to take, and that they were welcome to enter and take what they liked. Still without listening to them the thieves kept digging out a window from the wall. Then Kunju began to use threats and said he would give them a good drubbing if they persisted in their mischief; and he tried to go out of the southern door to face the thieves. Maharshi dissuaded him, saying: "Let these (thieves) play their role (*Dharma*); we shall stick to ours. Let them do what they like; it is for us to bear and forbear. Let us not interfere with them." Despite this unruffled forbearance (*titiksha*) of Maharshi and of Kunju, who obeyed Maharshi's direction, the bluster and mischief of the thieves increased. They threw some squibs at the window to create the impression that they had firearms with them. Again they were told to enter and take what they liked, not minding Kunju's threats; but they replied with vows

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of vengeance on that young man. Then Kunju left the cottage, crossed the fields and reached the town to get help, so that Maharshi might be safe.

Meanwhile Ramakrishna again asked the thieves not to create unnecessary trouble but to take what they liked. The thieves threatened to burn down the thatched roof. Maharshi told them that they should not do that, and offered to leave the hall and go away with the other inmates. This was the very thing they wanted. Maharshi wanted the sickly dog Karuppan first to be taken to a safe place lest the thieves should beat and kill it; so Ramakrishna carried it to a shed. Before he returned, Maharshi with the other disciples Thangavelu Pillai, Mastan, and Munisamier issued out of the northern door. The thieves beat each of them with sticks, evidently with a view to disable them. Maharshi received a blow on his left thigh, and at once said "If you are not satisfied yet, you may strike the other leg also." But either the ruffian's heart did not allow him to take the Swami at his word or, what is more probable, Ramakrishna came up just in time, extended both his hands over the Swami, and thus warding off the thief's strokes, took Maharshi further north. Then the beaten party reached the *pandal* of the northern shed and sat there. The thieves directed them to stay there, adding "If you budge from here, your heads will be smashed." Maharshi told the thieves, "You have the entire hall to yourself; do what you like." Then a thief returned and said he wanted a hurricane lamp. Maharshi ordered that it should be given to him, so Ramakrishna gave him a lighted lamp. Again a thief returned and wanted the keys of the bureau. But this bunch Kunju

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had carried away and the thief was informed of that fact. The thieves broke open the almirahs and carried away a razor, strips of silver that adorned the images, a little rice and some mangoes. The total worth of the Asram property thus taken, was about ten rupees. Cash *viz.*, six rupees of the visitor Thangavelu Pillai was also taken away. A thief, grossly disappointed, returned with uplifted stick and said "Where is your money, where do you keep *that*?" Maharshi told him that they were poor *sadhus* living upon alms—and never had cash. Repeatedly the thief urged this question, got the same reply, and then went back to the hall.

After the thief went back, Maharshi advised Ramakrishna and others who had received injuries, to use some balm for allaying their pain. "But what about Swami?" was Ramakrishna's inquiry, to which the Swami humourously replied that he had "received adequate *pooja,*" which literally means worship, though here it signified blows. Ramakrishna then saw the weal on the left thigh of his master. He seized an iron implement that was hard by and wanted "permission to go in and see what the thieves were doing." Maharshi noted his excitement and dissuaded him from violence. "We are *sadhus,* we should not give up our role (*Dharma*)," he said. "If you go and strike them some may die. That will be a matter for which the world will justly blame not the thieves, but *us*. These are only misguided men. They are blinded by ignorance. But let *us* note what is right and stick to it. Sometimes your teeth suddenly bite your own tongue; do you knock them out in consequence?" Maharshi thus quieted Ramakrishna from avenging his master.

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At 2 A.M. the thieves left. Later Kunju returned with a village officer and a couple of constables. Maharshi was still seated in the northern shed, calm, composed and discoursing with the disciples on matters spiritual as usual. The constables asked Maharshi what had happened. He drily remarked that some fools had broken into the Asram and gone away disappointed at finding nothing worth their trouble. The constables made an entry of this fact and went away with the officer. Munisamier (a young boy doing pooja at the Asram) then ran after them and told them that Maharshi and others had been beaten by the robbers. In the morning the Circle Inspector, Sub-Inspector, and a Head Constable came up for investigation followed by the Deputy Superintendent. Maharshi talked to none of them about his injury.

Maharshi never spoke with anger or pain about the thieves ; in fact he rarely referred to the incident. A few days later some of the Asram property was recovered and the thieves were arrested, promptly tried and convicted.

The robbery was ample proof that the virtues of self-conquest, self-effacement, equanimity (*Samatva*), dispassion (*Vairagya*), forgiveness and beneficence that characterised the young Swami at the Patalalinga, under the iluppai tree, and in Gurumurtam, had only matured during the twenty-six years despite the attention, adulation and worship from admirers and disciples.

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CHAPTER XXII

ANIMAL COMPANIONS

Who sees with equal eye, as lord of all,
A hero perish or a sparrow fall,
.....
To him no high, no low, no great, no small.

—*Pope.*

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small.

A characteristic of Maharshi that strikes every visitor is the way in which he deals with animals, especially those living in the Asram. "Lakshmi has come; give her rice-food at once," he says, looking from the hall through the window; and the newcomer think that some young girl had to be given her meal. But presently steps in a cow answering the name "Lakshmi." "Have the boys (பசங்கள்) been given their food?" he again asks. Probably there are little boys brought up here or come out for a visit, one would think. But presently a couple of dogs answer a whistle and each is told to take his plateful of rice-food. "She wants water," says Maharshi, referring to one of them—"Rose." "Come here, boy", he calls to a little cat, "lie down and wait awhile for your plate." One watches the Swami for days, months and years, and never finds him calling any of these animals "it" or treating it as being less than a human being.

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The key to Maharshi's treatment of animals inside or outside the Asram is soon discovered. First, from the human level he views these as life's stars that have had elsewhere their setting, as souls which have come from afar after having cast off their former, perhaps human, sheaths to live near him and work out the effects of their past (*karma*) actions.

Next, his outlook on life being seldom confined to this level, he soars higher and higher in flights spiritual and lumps together man and brute without difference as *Iswara* (God) Himself. Then in his view :—

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole
Whose body Nature is, but God the Soul ;
That changed through all, and yet in all the same ;
Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame ;
Warms in the Sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent ;
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full as perfect in a hair, as heart :
As full as perfect in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns ;
To him, no high, no low, no great, no small
He fills, he bounds, connects and equals all.
Nothing is foreign, parts relate to whole,
One all extending, all preserving Soul
Connects each being, greatest with the least ;
Made beast in aid of man, and man of beast ;
All served, all serving ; nothing stands alone ;
The chain holds on ;—and where it ends, unknown."

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DOGS

Ever since the Swami went up the hill dogs have been his companions and participants of the life of the Asram. He knows their pedigree as well as he knows his own. "This Kamala is the ancient dame. 'Nila' and 'Jack' are her children; 'Rose' and these little imps are her grand-children," he would say to a new-comer. Addressing the little pups when Kamala lay dying, he said: "you little fellows! why do you not go and see your granny? She is going to leave you soon"; and after her death, he addressed 'Rose,' just as he would address and sympathise with any human disciple who came to him in his bereavement. "Rose, you have lost your granny Kamala." He remembers the series of dogs at the Asram, which in memory of their predecessors were given the same name, but which to distinguish them from each other are respectively styled here No. I, II, etc. Jack I was the first of the series. He was succeeded by Jack II, etc. As it is not the object of this book to write their biographies, but that of the Swami, just a few facts about the canine inmates of the Asram will be mentioned to illustrate the Swami's attitude towards these companions or disciples. The term "disciples" and "companions" need not raise a smile in the reader, who ridicules the suggestion that these dogs have a moral purpose, spiritual principles, and a capacity for spiritual improvement. The Swami's accounts of several of them will remove his incredulity. Let us take any of these at random as told by the Swami to the writer of these pages a few years back.

"Chinna Karuppan was black all over, whence his name. He was of high principles. As we were in the

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Virupaksha cave, a black object used to pass us sometimes from a distance. We were able sometimes to see his head peeping over the bushes, which showed his *Vairagya* (non-attachment) to be very strong. He kept company with none ; he seemed in fact to avoid company. We respected his independence and *Vairagya* and used to leave food for him near his place. One day, as we were going up, Karuppan suddenly jumped across the path and romped upon me wagging his tail in glee. How he singled me out of the group for the display of his affection was the wonder. Thereafter he remained with us in the Asram as one of the inmates. A very intelligent and serviceable fellow he was ; and how high-souled ! He lost all his former aloofness and proved very affectionate. Universal brotherhood was his motto. He would hobnob with every visitor and inmate, get up his lap and nestle close to him. His overtures would be mostly well received. A few however tried to avoid him. But he was indefatigable in his efforts and would take no refusal as final. If however he was ordered off, he obeyed like a monk observing the vow of obedience. Once he went near an orthodox Brahmin who was engaged in repetition of holy syllables at the foot of a bel tree close to our cave. The Brahmin considered dogs to be unholy and scrupulously avoided their contact and even proximity. Yet Chinna Karuppan insisted on going near him. An inmate of the Asram, out of consideration for the Brahmin's feelings, raised his stick and beat the dog but not forcibly ; and he wailed and ran away. Karuppan, who then left the Asram, was never again found. He would not care to approach a place where he was ill-treated even once, so sensitive was he ! In fact that inmate had made this mistake

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despite previous warning, evidently because he did not rate this dog's principles and sensitiveness at their proper worth. The warning given to one and all was thiswise :— 'Once before Palaniswami had been rude in speech and behaviour to Chinna Karuppan. It was on a cold rainy night; all the same Chinna Karuppan left the precincts and laid outside on a bag of charcoal some distance from the Asram, whence he was recalled only next morning.' Another warning had been given from the behaviour of a little dog. 'Palaniswami some years back chid the little dog who was with us in Virupaksha cave. He at once ran down into the Sankha tirtam tank, in which his carcass was seen floating after some time. Palaniswami and all others were at once told that dogs and other animal inmates of the Asram have intelligence and principles of their own and should not be roughly treated.' We do not know what souls may be tenanting these bodies and for finishing what portion of their unfinished *Karma* they seek our company.

About dogs and their relation to Maharshi an interesting history can be written; but space permits only a few more.

The Asram had several dogs manifesting great intelligence and serving strangers as guides like St. Bernard's dogs. Segappan, Kamala and others were able to guide strangers all round the hill. "Kamala, take this gentleman round," was all the Swami had to say; and she would take him to every image, tank, and cave round the hill, and bring him back. Jack No. 1, combined strict obedience with intelligence and sensitiveness. Once Maharshi and others started from Virupaksha cave to

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make a circuit of the hill, walking directly across the hill and into the forest for a good distance. When starting, Maharshi said to Jack, as he was lying down at the cave : "Now we are going for our circuit ; you had better go down to the town." They started walking southwards across the hill and had done over a mile when they saw Jack running down the hill to the town, *i.e.,* towards the east in obedience to the order given him. After some distance he was lost to sight. After they had walked over a mile in their own direction into the forest, they noted that Jack had gone down and reascended the hill and waited for them in the track they had chosen. Maharshi told him then : "You had better go back to the Asram and not come with us." And away went the dog, probably sore at heart to part company from his master, prizing obedience however as a great virtue. But this was not his only virtue. He was a great *Tapasvi* (self-restrained) and a lover of peace and quiet. He would take his breakfast out of the food offered to God at a dancing-girl's house in the morning, then accompany the priest to a temple on the hill and, leaving him there, he would climb up higher to Virupaksha cave to meet Maharshi and then go and squat in an adjoining cave and remain in silence and peace. He would not associate with other dogs or be a party to quarrels. At 9 or 9-30 A.M. he would go out and be just in time to take the *Naivedya* or *bali,* food offering, at the hill temple and run back to his cave. He would take what was given to him at the Asram and not seek to eat at other times, or run after bitches. In the evening he would run down again to the dancing-girl's house for his night meal and sleep at a mutt with the priest. His was just the life of a hermit (*Satvic Vyragi*)

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trying to end his days at the Feet of God. One morning a cheeta* set on him and mauled his neck, and he set up a howl which was heard at the hill temple. The priest there raised a cry and the cheeta left him and ran away. Though he escaped the jaws of the cheeta then, he seems however to have fallen a victim to it later, in 1905-06, when plague raged in the town for five or six months and the houses were deserted.

Maharshi, as stated already, treats all animals as fellow ascetics, who have come to work out their Karma in his proximity. He talks to them and gives them a few simple directions which they mostly understand and obey. He is careful about their comfort, cleanliness, baths, beds, etc., and terms them affectionately "பையன்கள்" —"the boys" or "children" of the Asram. Just as children are given their food first, these dogs, as also cats, cows, etc., are first served with their meals or any sweets received; and thereafter, the beggar-guests (the 'दरिद्रनारायण' "God in the guise of the poor") who wait outside are given their doles of food; and lastly Maharshi, his guests and inmates of the Asram take the remaining food. Whether it is coffee or candy, cake or other cooked food, these "children" must be served first.

Maharshi's treatment of dogs, monkeys, etc., did not stop with these attentions. He was unmarried and had no children; but it was God's will to give him other "children" not begotten of him. That did not make any difference in their treatment. For instance when Kamala came as a little pup to Skandasram, the inmates wished to drive her away lest she should litter the Asram with

* Cheetas are small-sized tigers who seldom attack men.

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pups year after year. Little Kamala put up with all the rudeness offered, and would not leave the place. The Asram then bowed to the inevitable and Kamala grew up and littered at the Asram ; and her pups became a large family (*Samsara*) encumbering the Asram. Maharshi however did not swerve from his *Samabuddhi*, the principle of equal treatment to man and beast. On the first delivery of Kamala she was given her bath, painted with turmeric, decked with vermilion on the forehead, given a clean place in the Asram, and kept there for ten days with her pups. On the tenth day, the *Punyahavachanam* (purification) was celebrated with not merely a bath for her, but also with the regular feasting on *payasam* and sweetmeats for all. At the death of these animal companions, Maharshi was generally in attendance by their side, just as he was by his mother in her last moments. After they breathed their last they were given a solemn and decent burial in or near the Asram just as any other inmate would be given, and a stone was planted over the tomb. A full account of how Maharshi dealt with the numerous dogs that were his fellows in these Asrams would fill a volume. We may content ourselves here with this comparatively brief mention, and the assertion that if anyone lives up to the ideal set out in the Bhagavat Gita :

"The wise look with equal eye on a learned but humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a chandala living on dog's flesh,"—

विद्याविनयसंपन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि ।
शुनिचैव श्वपाकेच पण्डितास्समदर्शिनः ॥

Geetha. V—18.

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it is Maharshi. In fact eminent pandits and the Asram dogs sat alike on the same floor before Maharshi, and were equally attended to without distinction either in food or hygenic attentions.

COWS

The Swami's treatment of other animals may be mentioned next. Some years back a cow was kept for a short time in the Asram at the Palitirtham. It was with difficulty guarded from the attacks of cheetas. One of its calves is Lakshmi. But when Lakshmi was very young she and her mother (requiring continued attention which the Asram could not then bestow) were given to some one in the town to be looked after. On a festive day, two years ago, both of them were brought to the Asram. Since then Lakshmi runs up every morning and gets the entire pasture at the Asram to herself. She certainly does not content herself with that. She knows meal and tiffin times and on both occasions she walks right into the hall and places her head on Maharshi, who strokes her with affection and calls out to people in the kitchen to give her food.

She sometimes seizes an entire bunch of eight or ten plaintain fruits that some one may have brought, or dirties the hall with her excreta; perhaps a disciple in attendance threatens to beat her: the Swami at once intercedes on her behalf. If she trespasses on the small vegetable garden, the Swami objects to her being scolded or roughly treated. "You must fence your plot better. The fault is there and not with Lakshmi," he says. On festive occasions she gets a good bath, turmeric paste and

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a little dot of vermilion powder on her forehead, with possibly one or more garlands of flowers round her neck. She goes up to the Swami and takes leave every evening before leaving the Asram for the town and takes in parting presents if any should be available. She is the Sakuntala of the Asram now.* Maharshi sometimes informs those present of her history and quotes with evident approval the theory of his devotees that Lakshmi is the present incarnation of the "old lady of the greens" "கீரைப்பாட்டி".

When the Swami went uphill in 1900, there was an old lady who used to go round gathering greens and other edible leaves, and beg for sundry articles. She would cook these in her own nook at the temple on the hill and carry up a good share of it to the young Swami and say: "Here have I brought just a little of greens, take it." It would often be a good quantity though, which the Swami would take. He would go down to her residence, cut vegetables, remove the fibres and assist her in her cooking. That old dame, loving him with all a mother's love, left this earth some years back and is interred close to the present Asram. Is the dull clod there all that is left of her? No. "Her love in higher love endures." The divine glow in her breast must surely have swollen the divine stream in the young Swami's heart that now

* Since 1935 Lakshmi became a permanent resident of the Ashram, where she lived with her children and grand-children till her death, which took place on the 18th June 1948. She was buried in the Ashram compound. Over her grave a small structure was erected bearing her statue and a tablet on which was inscribed in gold the Tamil quartain which Sri Bhagavan had composed in her honour, wherein he referred to her as a "liberated soul."—*Publisher.*

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nourishes and supports hundreds or thousands that affectionately flock to him and get their full meed of love from him. Among these thousands, by no means the least is Lakshmi, who loves her lord and is loved by him. Is not the same golden thread of love in the spirit of the "Greens Dame" clearly discernible in Lakshmi?

MONKEYS

Since the Swami went up the hill in 1900 and up to November 1922 when he came down to the present Asram he moved with monkeys very closely, understood their cries and their conduct, and followed the history of several of them. He studied them and found that they have a code of morals, principles of government, a system of sending a plenipotentiary from one camp to another before war is declared or peace is resolved upon, and many other principles and feelings common to men. He watched their swimming, diving and other sports, and once in the hill Asram tended one of their kings or "chieftains" known as *Nondi* since his infancy. The intense and sincere sympathy the Swami has towards animals, enables him to understand their feelings, attitudes and even cries. He often said that monkeys used to regard him as one of their class. "Monkeys as a rule would ex-communicate one of their group if he had been looked after by men; but they made an exception in the case of this Asram. When there were internecine bickerings and misunderstandings, both parties would come to me and I would pacify them and stop their further quarrel.

"A young monkey was bitten by an elder member of his group, and left helpless near the

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Asram. This little fellow came limping to the Asram at Virupaksha cave. Hence he was christened *Nondi* (the lame one). When five days later his group came in, they saw he was tended by the Asram, yet took him back into the group. Thence forward they would all come in and get any little things that could be spared for them outside the Asram ; but *Nondi* would proceed right on to my lap. *Nondi* was a scrupulously clean eater. When a plate of rice was placed before him, he would not allow a single particle of it to be scattered outside the plate. If it was, he would pick it up, eat it, and then proceed to the contents of the plate. He was very sensitive though. One day for some reason he threw out some food, and I chid him saying, What! why are you scattering food? He at once hit me over the eye and slightly hurt me. As a punishment he was not allowed for some days to approach me. But he cringed and begged hard, and regained his blissful seat. That was his second offence. On the first occasion, *Nondi* felt irritated at his own cup of hot milk being taken near my lips to be cooled when he struck me over the eye ; but as there was no serious hurt and as he at once affectionately re-occupied my lap and cringed as much as to say 'Forget and forgive : let bygones be bygones,' he was excused."

Swami's treatment of monkeys was similar to his treatment of dogs ; and much space need not be devoted to details. Two incidents however are worth mentioning before we pass on to other animals. A monkey raja or chieftain who had exiled or ex-communicated two of his strong adherents who had the next claim to chieftainship, was getting very weak, and stayed away or was left near the Asram one night while the group returned to their

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lodgings in the plains. Early morning it was reported that a monkey was dying. Maharshi went up and found he was in a bad state. He was taken up to the Asram. At the time when the raja died the two exiled chieftains had come up and were sitting on an adjoining tree. The chieftain died while he was being supported on the Swami's body. Once as the Swami shifted his weight, the raja instinctively bit the Swami. Pointing to the mark on his leg, the Swami smiled and said: "I have four such marks of favour from monkey-rajas or chieftains." The raja died uttering a strange groan: and hearing it, the two monkeys jumped up with pain and sorrow, as was evidenced by their cries. The Swami gave the deceased raja all the honours due to a deceased monk or Sanyasi. The body was bathed in milk and again in water: and plenty of sacred ashes were smeared over it. A new cloth as shroud was spread on it, leaving the face uncovered. Camphor was lit up before him, as is done before dead hermits; even his face glowed like that of a monk. Then he was buried in a tomb hard by, over which a stone was placed—"e'en these bones from insult to protect."

Compared with other domestic creatures, monkeys occupy a low position in the ethical scale. Dogs, for instance, are generally faithful, honest, self-controlled and highly grateful. Monkeys seem to possess a few of these virtues. Maharshi, however, cites one instance of simian gratitude. About twenty years back, on a hot day, he left the Virupaksha cave along with some devotees to make the hill-circuit. At about 1 P.M., they were trudging along, tired and hungry, near the Pachaiamman Koil. A group of monkeys observed them, ran up a *Jambol* tree, vigorously shook down an abundance of ripe fruits and

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ran away immediately without eating any. This group had evidently tasted Maharshi's hospitality at his Asram and was now repaying the obligation. The party gladly picked up and ate the fruits.

CROWS AND SQUIRRELS

The Swami's sympathy gained the confidence of even crows and squirrels. These would come with their young ones and take eatables from his palm and thrust bits of them into the young ones' mouths. Even a serpent once exhibited similar confidence. Serpents were his fellow-lodgers in several of these caves. "We have come to their residence," he would say, "and have no right to disturb them. They do not molest us." On one occasion at the Skandasram his mother was frightened when a cobra approached her. The Swami however came near it and the cobra moved away. He followed it as it passed between two rocks till the passage came to a blind end when it turned back its head and, coiling its body, stared at him. He also stood and gazed at it in turn. This mutual fascination went on for some minutes ; then the serpent quietly crawled towards the Swami, having gained confidence in him. He waited till it came very near his feet and then withdrew them, at which the cobra left the place. Though thrice stung by scorpions, the Swami felt no pain (which is due to the peculiar constitution which he and several others have) nor did he kill any of them. In the Asram snakes and scorpions are, if seized, taken to a safe distance from the residential quarters and released unharmed.

Before closing this chapter, an incident in the Swami's life may be narrated which sets out not merely

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his powers of endurance, but also his readiness to recognise the rights of animals as against himself. Some years ago Maharshi had a long walk down-hill from Virupaksha cave and climbed up through an unfrequented track. Here he passed by a bush in which there was a hornets' nest which he failed to notice. As he passed by it his left bare thigh grazed against it. Before he advanced a few steps the hornets rushed out at him and settled on the same thigh that had disturbed them. They dug into his flesh, "Yes, Yes, this is the guilty leg, let it suffer," said the Swami. He did not drive them off, nor did he move away till the hornets left him. He bore the excruciating pain bravely—it was for him to endure the agony in silence. The answer given to his mother (see page 66) was no ingenious philosophy devised for the nonce to ward off a troublesome request, but a rule of life on which he always acted. "In matters beyond your power to rectify exercise endurance: 'Endurance! More endurance!! Yet more endurance!!!' is the best rule to preserve equanimity and strengthen the mind for *Samadhi* (ecstatic trance) which involves the entire suppression of external contact." So bravely enduring the pain, he climbed up and reached his cave hours later, bearing the seal of hornets' justice in numerous patches on his thigh.

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CHAPTER XXIII

GIRIPRADAKSHINAM, SACRED HILL CIRCUIT

"This is God's Hill in which it pleaseth Him to dwell: Yea, the Lord will abide in it for ever."

ALMOST from the time the young Swami came to Tiruvannamalai and until 1926 he used to perform *Pradakshinam* of the hill several times a year. One would like to know what this practice means and why he should take to it so frequently.

Round the hill runs a good metalled road about eight miles long bordered by fine, shady trees, numerous tanks, and *mantapams* or temples on both sides. This is the "Pradakshinam Road," along which one can see pious crowds moving any day of the week (especially on Tuesdays). These first bathe in some sacred tank, put on clean clothing, smear the forehead (or even the body) with holy ashes, wear perhaps beads of rudraksha (symbolical of God Siva) and then start on their pious circuit. A few start alone, as in many respects solitude is recommended to get the best results. On their way they bow to, and circle round many a holy person, temple or image. Some insist on having a few drops of the holy waters of all the tanks sprinkled over their heads or even bathe in them. A few roll over the entire eight miles, using their bodies like a road-roller (*Anga Pradakshinam*), taking

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several days to complete this feat. A few others combine "*Atma Pradakshinam*" with this Giripradakshinam, i.e., eddy round and round themselves on the road at short intervals. Some persons stop and bow to or fall prostrate before God (Arunachala Siva) as symbolised by the hill at short intervals. Various are the ways in which people express their devotion to the hill. The majority however avoid ostentation and extremes, and content themselves with walking slowly with the mind intent on God.

When Maharshi starts the entire set at the Asram starts with him, as every one is eager to accompany him. Sometimes they start at night-fall after a meal and return just at dawn. Sometimes they start in the morning and take a day or two to return. One may wonder why so many hours or days are required to walk only eight miles, which could be done in three hours. But Maharshi goes on these circuits mainly to set an example to and benefit others. Arunachala Purana says that one must walk as slowly as a princess would in the tenth month of her pregnancy without even the sound of footsteps. Likewise Maharshi moves often in a state of Samadhi: such an intense ecstasy implies slow and even breath and absence of haste or exertion. So he moves at the rate of one mile per hour, and then rest for some fifteen minutes in suitable places which are available at every mile or even half-mile. While engaged in this circuit he enjoys the bliss of the Atman and cares not for the sounds and sights. He is in the Universal centre, in the only Reality, in the Being of beings.

Some years back, on one of these occasions, Maharshi composed his *Aksharamanamalai*—an acrostic of one

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hundred and eight stanzas upon Arunachala—the stanzas beginning with the successive letters of the Tamil alphabet. He composed *Arunachala Ashtakam* on a later occasion. As there is more sequence of thought in these later stanzas the gist of them may be given here to enable the reader to follow the Swami's thoughts during that circuit.

1. A boy, I came to Thee,
Not knowing what Thou wert,
I came up here and saw,
And found Thou wert a Hill.

2. But who is then the seer ?
Deep into that I probed.
No seer then remained ;
No mind survived at all
To say that this I saw,
Or e'en to say I didn't.
As Dakshinamoorthy once,
Silent Thou taughtst the truth.
Thou dost the same e'en now,
Thou silent, standing Hill !
If Thou forbear to speak
Who else can voice Thy truth ?

3. Well can one say of Thee
That Thou in form art seen.
Yet truly can he speak
Thee formless and unseen.
Ah ! who can know Thy nature ?
Can any plumb Thy depths ?
To sound the Ocean's depth
With measuring tape in hand
A sugar doll once plunged

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And lost itself for e'er.
Thus trying Thee to know,
Thyself must one become.

4. Oh, Thou art That which is;
The only thing that is.
Yet men run here and there
In quest of many Gods!
But raise inquiry's torch
And seek the truth of Gods,
These Gods then fly away
As darkness from the light.
And what remains is Thou,
That gave each creed its God.
Thy light is as the Sun's.
Who sees not Thee is blind.
Oh, mayst thou shed Thy light,
Within my heart for ever!

5. Thou 'art the central string
Sustaining earthly creeds
E'en as thou dost sustain
Whatever moves or lives.
When mind cremates itself
And inward vision gains,
And further plunges deep,
Ah! then is seen. Thy light.
When once Thy light is gained,
Avaunt! all earthly fears;
All objects—shows—depart.
The mind's a sensitive plate.
If Brahman's solar rays
Do once upon it fall
'T is sensitive no more;

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There objects of the world
No more impression make.
And is there aught in truth
Beside Thy glorious self ?

6. Thou art the only Real,
The centre Light, the Heart.
Thine is the wondrous pow'r
That off from Thee is not.
That power whirls the roll
Of subtle films of mind
Before Thy pure white light,
Thus color'd forms stream forth
Athwart the mental lens,
On Thee, the seeming screen,
As in a cinema show.
The many change and pass ;
The one, remainest Thou,

7. Of thoughts, the "I" is first,
'T is only after that,
'You,' 'he,' 'she,' 'it,' 'they,' 'these'
And other thoughts appear.
But if these thoughts arise,
One should not yield to them.
"To whom do these arise ?"
Must be his only thought.
The answer comes out clear,—
"These thoughts arise to me."
His question next must be,
"Who is this 'I' and whence ?"
Thus let him seek the source
From which the "I" thought springs,—
The source that's nam'd the Heart.

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And when the Heart is reach'd,
Swarajya sure is gain'd,
Where difference is gone
Of self and of not-self,
Of virtue and of vice,
Of sorrow and of joy.
No death is there, nor birth,
No darkness, nor seen light.
All these illusions fly,
Before Thy glorious blaze.

8. The waters of the ocean
By sun and wind upraised
As cloud and rain descend
Down hill and slope as streams
To reach again their source,
The Ocean, and there rest.
The feather'd tribe that leaves
Its leafy home on earth
And restless, on the wing,
E'er wanders far and wide
At last to find its rest,
Its starting place regains.
Oh Arunachal great!
'Tis from Thy wisdom's ocean,
The Jivas* flow'd of yore.
'Tis from thy tree of life,
These birds took flight in air.
Now that they long for rest,
Inquiring what's their source,
They flow or fly to Thee
Their ocean or their tree.

* 'Jivas' means individual souls.

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There is nothing more to write of what occupies Maharshi's mind during these circuits. The rest of this chapter will deal with the way in which his entourage conduct themselves and the benefit they derive. His fame is so great and the merit of feeding him is so highly prized that as soon as people hear of his starting on the pilgrimage they prepare or obtain articles of food, wait at a number of wayside buildings, and request him and his group to stop and partake of their offerings. Sometimes they cook there and feed (especially if the circuit is by day) the whole group. As one might expect, most of the followers are attracted by the religious merit of the circuit, and the Maharshi's company. A few are always attracted by the "loaves and fishes" and the "pots of manna" and some by sheer curiosity. But even fools who come with grosser ends in view, get some spiritual benefit by observing the noble and inspiring conduct of Maharshi and his chief disciples: the impressions of the circuit soak unnoticed into their subconscious minds where they germinate, grow and fructify, and hasten the awakening.

Let us see what the Swami's chief followers do and think on these occasions. It is a trite saying that the same objects are seen by different people differently, by reason of the difference in their equipment, attitude, etc. Some of the Swami's camp have always been quite prosaic, matter of fact men, of whom it may justly be said,

A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And it was nothing more,

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while of others it might truly be said :

> To them the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

We shall take up the latter class and see how they view the holy perambulation and what benefits they derive from it.

To begin with, let us take the hill itself. To the pious devotees, it drops its material nature and assumes a spiritual one. It is no longer earth and rock. Touched by the magic of Devotion, it becomes suffused with light and stands out as the symbol of the Supreme Lord of the Universe—nay as the Lord Himself. Its physical properties are now the attributes of Divinity and excite the deepest and loftiest emotions. What a sense of confidence its mighty strength and benevolence inspire! What serenity and detachment, what lofty aspiration they feel as they behold its "starry-pointing" peak that sheds heaven's blessed waters on all sides to fertilise and nourish the plains and to give men and beasts alike their food and drink!

What enduring, uniform and all-embracing love towards all sentient creatures permeates and transforms the devotees as they find cheetahs and cattle, cobras and cave-dwellers flourishing side by side on its bosom! And to the very select few who can rise to the heights of *undifferenced,* characterless ecstasy, how helpful are its firmness and its unity in variety.

The more they direct their attention to the hill, the more it absorbs them into itself. Just a few thoughts of

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its external form, and then lo! they sink deep, deep within. Some address themselves to Lord Arunachala and according to their varying moods praise and dance or pray and weep. One Gajanana, who stayed for some months with the Swami was full of fervent faith in Sree Hari.* He would constantly sing songs from Srimad Bhagavata and would dance in his joy most of the way round the hill. Others poured forth their soul in the language of Sivanandalahari, Tevaram, Tiruppugazh, Aksharamanamalai, etc., aided by cymbals and tambur, drum (Mridangam) and fiddle.

The last, but by no means the least, of the pilgrims is the one who goes on repeating silently the dear Lord's name (such as the *Panchakshari*) and by dint of meditation becomes himself the object of his own "thought." Then really thought is not. In enjoyment it expires.

[*Note*: More than twenty years before the end, Maharshi gave up these circuits of the hill, as what should have been a source of edification for all, developed with the growing crowds into something far different. Many coming just for the novelty and with the hope of getting something to eat.—*Publisher.*]

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* One need not be surprised at his singing of Sri Mahavishnu in his Sivakshetram and when going round Siva. There is no intolerance or sharp difference between the two cults of Siva and Vishnu here. The temple and hill were originally Maha-Vishnu's. Even now Sri Vaishnavites regard the hill as Sudarsana the sacred wheel (of Time perhaps) in the hands of God. And just behind the image of Siva in the big temple is the image of Sri Venugopala (a form of Sri Mahavishnu) in whose name the temple site still stands registered.

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CHAPTER XXIV

A DAY AT THE ASRAM

शान्तमिदमाश्रमपदं

Solemn stillness reigns in this abode of hermits.

विश्वासोपगमादभिन्नगतयश्शब्दं सहन्ते मृगाः

The animals here, emboldened by their confidence hear (human) sounds with unaltered pace.

—*Sakuntala.*

LET us peep into the Asram to watch its daily life. There are special days in which it is very busy, when it attracts very large number of visitors such as the *Kartikai* Festival, the *Jayanti day* (Maharshi's birthday), and the anniversary of his mother's passing. On the last two occasions over a thousand invited persons are fed (the number of the uninvited poor runs to several thousands); there is special and prolonged pooja in the Matrubhuteswara temple, and generally there is the piper's nagaswaram or other music. On his birthday Maharshi is visited by large numbers of resident and non-resident disciples, and is placed amidst numerous garlands and festoons on a decorated dais. His loving disciples swarm to his feet and spend some hours in his company. There is feasting with choice delicacies and plenty of other dishes which serve to remind all of the blessed day which ushered in this great enlightened soul to the world.

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There are a few things to note about Maharshi's conduct on these special days. When thousands are to be fed, he is apprehensive that nice things will be provided and the complete course served only for the first or second batch of persons and that the last sitting may be given only a diluted sauce and tiny bits of the good things. More than four hundred or five hundred cannot be accommodated at a time, and the total number fed goes up to two thousand or more. So he refuses to sit for his meal till the last is served. His unvarying principle when anything is prepared at the Asram or brought by any votaries for pleasing his palate is never to touch anything unless there is a sufficient quantity to go round, an equal share to all present. Some one brings occasionally a cup of very nice "Turkish coffee" or a little *halwa* and tells the Swami: "It is very good; Swami may take it." The Swami immediately answers: "Why should I? Am I not happy without it? If I am to take anything, all must take it," and the proffered article is returned without being tasted, or is offered to the dogs or other animals present. The Swami is never elated at a banquet nor depressed at Spartan fare. In fact one rule of his at meal makes the former rather trying. He observes from the days of his boyhood the rule never to throw away anything served on his plate, but to consume patiently all things. He would certainly be better off if he reversed his rule, and ate only what was absolutely necessary and rejected the rest. But that is medical advice which ignores the sentiments that underlie the Swami's rule. Another characteristic of his when he sits for dinner is that he inquires after and sees that an impartial service is made to all present, even the poorest and meanest—if meanness among men can exist in

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his presence—before he begins to take his meal. If any one refuses to take food, he is offered fruit or the thing he can take.

One more fact about these special occasions may be noted. The Swami avoids all pompous celebrations connected with him. In fact, when the first celebration of his birthday was being arranged by his devotees in 1912, he objected, giving his reasons in a couple of stanzas which he then composed in Tamil :—

பிறந்தநா ளேதோ பெருவிழாச் செய்வீர்
பிறந்தெவ ணுமென்ற பேணிப்—பிறந்திறத்த
லின்றென்று மொன்று மிலதுபொரு ளிறபிறந்த
வன்றே பிறந்தநா ளாம்.
பிறந்தநா ளேனும் பிறப்புக் கழாது
பிறந்தநா ளுற்சவமே பேண—லிறந்த
பினதிற் கலங்கரிக்கும் பெட்பென்றே தன்னை
யுணர்ந்தொடுங்க லுனே யுணர்வு.

1. Ye who wish to celebrate the birthday, seek ye first whence was your birth. That indeed is one's birthday when one enters that which transcends birth and death,—the Eternal Being.

2. At least on one's birthday one should mourn one's entry into this world (Samsara). To glorify and celebrate it is like delighting in decorating a corpse. To seek one's self and merge in the Self—that is wisdom.

The devotees' insistence that they wanted it for their own good and that the Swami might remain unconcerned finally prevailed; and ever since the Jayanti has been celebrated every year. Similarly when Perumalswami

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and some others desired to have a life-size bronze-statue of the Swami as aid to devotion he did not raise any objection, though he did not care to have a statue. Consequently one was made at great cost by the artist Nagappa. Some Swamis have a regular *Abhishekam* and *Pooja, i.e.,* water, milk, curds, oil, honey, sandal paste etc., are poured over their heads or feet as they are poured over sacred images; but our Swami never permits such things. He does not even permit camphor to be lighted or cocoanut to be broken before him, as it is done before idols. But his views do not always prevail. Over-zealous admirers, who fail to see his reason for objecting, violate them not infrequently. They daily light up camphor, break cocoanuts and praise him with a hundred and eight epithets or names (as they praise God) in their homes, using his picture for worship. When they come to the Asram they fail to see why the original should not be worshipped in exactly the same way. However some disciple in attendance dissuades them and often succeeds in saving the Swami from the ordeal.

As for *Padaseva, i.e.,* the actual touching of the Swami's feet and carrying the dust or washed water to the votary's head and lips and praising him as omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, etc., these occasionally take place and the Swami submits. It is the sacrifice he has to make for the "service of the world." "*Lokasangraha,*" adjusting oneself to the needs and ideas of the world, has been preached in the Bhagavad Gita, Ch. III. The votary cannot rise high in his spiritual flights unless he idealises his Guru, and transfigures the physical Guru into Divinity. The closing sentence of Swetaswatara Upanishad, which runs :—

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यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ ।
तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥

"These teachings will shine forth to him who has faith in Iswara, the Lord, and the same faith in his teacher as in the Lord,"

distinctly encourages the identification of the teacher with God or Brahman by the aspirant in his struggle for realisation (though to the realised man, the Jnani, all distinction of himself, God and Guru ceases). Hence the Swami does not damp the ardent votary's spirit in any matter essential for the latter's advancement. Gradually and gently, however, every votary is made to see his point of view also.

The Swami sets an example to all in his eating as in many other matters. He never exhibits any anxiety, depression, or elation at anything that may happen.

न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत् प्राप्यचाप्रियं

i.e., "Be not elated at attaining the desired or desirable objects; nor distressed at the contrary" says the Gita. The Swami who is the embodiment of this principle shows his equanimity best at these special gatherings when some "notable," (say a Judge or a Raja) turns up, but the Swami does not feel fluttered or flurried over his arrival or departure. A Nattukottai Chetti's agent once told the Swami that if he only agreed to accept the gift, his principal would provide two cows and a large fund to maintain them and their keeper out of the interest. The Swami drily remarked that the Asram was not needing cows, and that a cow would be an easy prey to the

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cheetas which not infrequently visit the Asram. The local District Superintendent of Police came at the time of Maharshi's birthday, offered to send any things required, and asked the Swami what he might send. He was told promptly that nothing was needed; whatever was sent was being distributed to all comers.

It is interesting to note how the Swami conducts himself at music. All of a sudden some devotee thinks that some songstress protegee of his who is to make her debut in the world should auspiciously begin her performance in Maharshi's presence at the same time pleasing the Swami thereby. Maharshi has some appreciation of music but is not fond of it (as Seshadriswami was). He sits through the performance statue-like, and neither shakes his head to express appreciation nor moves a finger to beat time or opens his lips to approve or disapprove or call for any particular song or tune. When the music is over, he smiles to the person responsible for the music and to the musician, and the smile is taken to mean "Thank you." Recently a rich Mudaliar brought a young, fair-looking dancing girl in silk and lace to sing her first public songs before Maharshi. At the end of the performance, the lassie stood up, smiled, smirked and moved about full of self-consciousness, striking up attitudes and making graceful gestures to charm and capture the hearts of the beholders. But Maharshi remained totally unmoved, as if she were a mere flesh-covered skeleton or a galvanised corpse playing tricks.

Maharshi explained the secret of his attitude towards music later, while explaining to some disciples how worldly objects are to be faced, and how a contemplation

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of unity is possible amidst the diverse pictures that present themselves to the senses and the mind at the time of devotion. He said: "When various notes are played or sung by the musician, if you keep your attention fixed on the *Sruti, i.e.,* the accompanying tambur or harmonium with its monotonous burden alone, it will not be distracted by the diverse notes or tunes; similarly in the world which is full of sights and sounds, keep attending to the *Sruti,* the one Reality that the Vedas proclaim, and your concentration will remain undisturbed." The real point of this advice is that freedom from distraction depends on the strength of the interest in the subject selected for concentration and on will-power and that the best way to increase the will-power is to will its increase, *i.e.,* by *Abhyasa* and *Vairagya* (constant practice and dispassion). But the advice incidentally shows how Maharshi keeps himself unconcerned by merely attending to the uniform, unchangeable *Sruti,* the one sound, and escapes the bonds of the varieties that "change and pass."

Let us look into the Asram on ordinary days. When there is no special function and no crowd, Maharshi spends almost all his time waking or sleeping on the sofa in the northern hall. He is available there all the hours of the day and night and to all comers. None requires to be announced or get permission to go into his presence. None need fear to go, bow, and take a seat anywhere and put any question regarding the thing that oppresses him or her. People often go in and praise him, and then pour their woes into his ears; incidentally, it may be added that all that is addressed to him in person can equally be found in the various letters he receives. One comes and praises him in Sanskrit verse, another in plain Tamil prose, a

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third in Telugu or Malayalam song or *Keertana**. Several go to him heart-broken. "I have lost my only child : of what use is life to me ? How am I now to get on ?" says one. Another has lost in his business and is faced with bankruptcy. A third has been deprived of his property and wants the Swami's blessings to win his law suit. A fourth case which is common, is that of a childless lady who daily importunes him mentally to exorcise the "barren spirit." A fifth has a disease, often incurable, and prays for a cure. A sixth is a neurotic with unaccountable fears and wants a recipe or a blessing to drive them away. Some hysterical and obsession cases also turn up. They begin to weep and wave their heads at times. Mostly all depart solaced and strengthened to some degree. Even among those who have a religious turn, curious types come up in person or by letter. One writes from the distant north that he is assured of the Swami's power to save him and that the Swami must positively grant him *Darsan* (vision of himself) by mystic power at the writer's village on a date fixed in the letter. Another says that his sorrows are great, which the Swami must somehow remove. Among those who write or visit, few care to go in for self-analysis or study even the most elementary books on religion or philosophy dealing with the problems vexing them ; few have any definite course of earnest devotion or practice of Vichara or Yoga. Most of them turn up with a vague desire to see the Brahmana Swami or Maharshi noted for his selflessness and equanimity (समत्व). They put some superficial questions which are easily met by a few simple answers, and go away without serious thought. Occasionally a sincere soul turns up

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* Kirtan is song set to music.

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requiring a little encouragement or a few words to clear points or explain experiences as yet unintelligible. Maharshi's answers to these are very apposite, and proceed on such high levels that some who hear do not understand the talk. The account of Natananandar (see Chapter XXVI) furnishes a good illustration. Hardly any of these conversations have been preserved.

A few devotees appear to have a special aptitude to rouse psychic power in Maharshi, power perhaps unconsciously exercised in all cases. To illustrate this the instance of Kulumani Narayana Sastri, a devout *bhakta*, disciple, of both Maharshi and Seshadriswami, who had received noticeable marks of favour and considerable attention in the development of his detachment (*Vairagya*) and illumination (*Jnana*) at the hands of the latter, may be cited. A person who was so highly honoured by Seshadriswami cannot be unreliable. Even apart from that, he is even now in our midst, leading a saintly, dedicated life; and his words command great respect.

About 1913, K. N. Sastri went to see Maharshi on the hill. He took with him a bunch of plantains which he had first carrried to the temple and offered to God Arunachala. On the way he saw the huge statue of Ganapati in front of that temple to which he *mentally* offered *one* of the fruits without plucking it from the bunch. In the temple he offered the whole bunch to Arunachala and took it back and gave it to Maharshi saying nothing about his mental offer. When it was about to be taken inside the cave by a disciple, Maharshi stopped him and said, "Stop, let us take the fruit offered to Ganapati." K. N. Sastri was taken aback with this remarkable thought

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reading. He concluded that Maharshi had the power described as चित्तसंवित् *chitta samvit* in Patanjali's Yoga sutra I, 35—power which includes clairvoyance, telepathy, etc. He carried with him his recent and as yet unknown composition in Sanskrit, a prose abridgment of Valmiki Ramayana and, without letting any one know of it, he composed a mental address in Sanskrit to Maharshi: "To you with your power of *chitta samvit*, a statement of the purpose of my visit would be a needless repetition." At once Maharshi, adverting to his purpose, said: "ராமாயணத்தை வாசிக்கிறது தானே,', "Why not take out (your) Ramayana and read it?" Sastri's object was to secure the அரங்கேற்றல், the first formal reading of his work in public before Maharshi. Now he rejoiced at the fulfilment of his desire and the manifestation of the powers of Maharshi.

Several devotees have constantly noticed that Maharshi addresses them on the very matter on which they intend to seek his help, without their expressing themselves. He himself has mentioned that not infrequently objects which he thinks of obtaining are brought to him without his asking. These perhaps show that particular persons and circumstances call forth his various powers. It is assuredly as unreasonable to disbelieve the phenomena on the ground that some persons alone have experienced them, as it is to impute partiality to Maharshi on that account. Nor can mere "chance" be an adequate explanation of so many instances.

A few light souls have occasionally dropped in to test Maharshi's learning or skill in dialectics. Though he

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has many important religious works (like portions of the Upanishads, V. Chudamani, etc.) in Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, etc., at his fingers' ends, he never cares to display his learning. When such people arrive, he remains quiet in *Samadhi*; and not infrequently the spirit of peace enters them, and they go away wiser. A few put useless questions like the following, "Herbert Spencer and Sri Aurobindo differ on the question whether in evolution some forms or links that are suggested by the principle of uniformity and continuity (*Natura non facit saltum, i.e.,* Nature does not make jumps) can be dispensed with by Nature. Does Swamiji think that evolution can leap over such chasms?" The Maharshi is not a Professor of Biology or Natural Science to solve all conundrums. He maintains silence in such cases, thereby pointing out the inappropriateness of such questions—especially those which do not affect the religious progress or happiness of the questioner. But he entertains neither ill-will nor anger and shows no disgust. Mention has already been made of one who asked him if he had seen God, and if it was a sin to kill a tiger. If however the question serves a useful purpose (even though the questioner's attitude is more critical than reverent), Maharshi is gracious enough to answer. Questions of Fate and Free-will, questions of the order of creation: whether the seed precedes the tree or the tree the seed, etc., similar questions are propounded; and he deals with them in his own way. When the former question was raised, he composed a stanza*

*விதிமதி மூல விவேக மிலார்க்கே
விதிமதி வெல்லும் விவாதம்—விதிமதிகட்
கோர்முதலாந் தன்னை யுணர்ந்தா ரவைதணந்தார்
சார்வரோ பின்னுமவை சாற்று.

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later becoming part of his "Ullathu Narpathu"—"The Real Forty" which says :—

"These controversies as to which is superior—Fate or Free-will—arise only to those who look not into the root of both. If one however knows the Self, the root and cause of both, one transcends both and will never again entertain thoughts of either." In other words, Maharshi cuts the ground from underneath the questioner, by pointing out that the problem arises only in the phenomenal world and not for the Self.

The writer of these pages sitting in his presence, and translating into Tamil the life and saying of Swami Vivekananda, wondered if any one, *e.g.*, Maharshi, could by a touch or a glance give him (the writer) the peculiar feeling or perception that all things are really of one substance, which Vivekananda derived by a single touch of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and whether such *Siddhi* (or miracle-working power) was worth having. Echammal at the same time put him the question point blank if *Siddhi* could be attained. Maharshi then, by way of answer to both, composed another stanza† for the same poem :—

"It is the realisation of, and firm adherence to, that which is ever existent that deserves the name Siddhi or attainment. Any other attainment of magical powers, is like attaining them in dreams. When he wakes up, does he really possess these? Will those who have brushed

† சித்தமா யுள்பொருளைத் தேர்ந்திருத்தல் சித்திபிற
சித்தியெலாஞ் சொப்பனமாஞ் சித்திகளே—சித்திரைவிட்
டோர்ந்தா லவைமெய்யோ வுண்மைநிலை யின்றபொய்ம்
தீர்ந்தார் தியங்குவரோ தேர். [மை

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Sri Bhagavan with a group of Devotees at Ashram.
(The author standing to the right of the Master, Kavyakanta and Niranjanananda Swami seated to his right and left.)

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Sri Bhagavan with a group of Devotees at Skandasramam.
(Niranjanananda Swami and Mother near his feet.)

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aside the unreal and established themselves in the Real be tempted by these ?" In this way, he draws all people back to the central truth that one must realise the Self, which alone confers happiness, and the thing to be attained. Incidentally he is prepared to solve and does solve other problems, if connected with the main question even remotely. Mr. N. N., a Madura Vakil, wanted to know if the various gods, devils and spirits really existed, and Maharshi answered him : "Yes, but that is only '*Vyavaharika Satya,*' phenomenal existence like your own."

N. N. :—Then Siva and other gods are not mere fictions like a "hare's horn ?"

M. :—No.

N. N. :—If they are like us, then they must be subject to dissolution (*Pralaya*)?

M. :—No. If you can become a *Jnani*, a *mukta* and the immortal Brahman, is it not reasonable to suppose that Siva, etc., who are infinitely wiser than you, have such *Jnana* and are the Immortal *Brahman* ?

Amritanatha asked if Siddhas exist even now, if there is a Siddha world, and if so what powers they wield, Maharshi replied that there are Siddhas even now wielding equal powers with Maheswara.

As it is not possible in a few pages to report all that Maharshi said to his numerous interlocutors, and as some of his discourses are found elsewhere, these will suffice for the present.

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Let us see what is being daily done at the Asram by him and his disciples.

Maharshi gets up between 3 and 4 A.M., which means that most of the others get up at the same time. After ablutions, he sits up on his sofa when some disciples begin the day by chanting his praise or reciting திருப்பள்ளி யெழுச்சி, திருவெம்பாவை or other parts of a long poem "Sri Ramana Sannidhimurai" by Muruganar extending over 1500 stanzas or chanting Maharshi's Tamil poems in praise of Arunachala. By 5 or 6 A.M. a regular stream of visitors pours in after an early bath in the neighbouring wells; they enter, prostrate before the Swami and go away. Then follows an adjournment to the dining hall for a light morning coffee with "*idli*" or "*Uppuma*"—dishes peculiar to South India of rice and black gram, or semolina. Then he returns to his seat; and the visitors pour in again. Among the disciples there is a division of labour. Some cull flowers, and make garlands; others fetch water and prepare *naivedya* (food offering) for the Pooja. Some go through the ceremony of Pooja at his mother's *samadhi*. Some are engaged in literary tasks,—composing, correcting, translating, and editing the works of or about Maharshi, and in rare cases works by or about other saints. Fetching and preparation of vegetables and other articles for cooking are attended to by a few disciples, and is superintended by his younger brother "Chinnaswami," Niranjanananda.* The Swami occasionally assists at these tasks as also in cooking, thereby securing some exercise for his limbs, and setting an

* Niranjanananda Swami is now the authorised agent or manager of the Asram and superintends all temporal work, under the title *Sarvadhikari*. (He passed away on 29th January, 1953. *Vide* Epilogue—Publisher.)

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excellent example of diligence and humility. Dignity of labour is plain to all, when they see the Maharshi cutting vegetables long before dawn and attending to the due mixture of the various components for the cooking. He does not stop with that. When there are no visitors, and when there is no literary or other work on hand, he polishes walking sticks, repairs kamandalas (water bowls), stitches leafplates, copies works in clear type-like print, binds books, and does other useful work.

Then follows breakfast between 11 A.M. and 12 noon which has been sufficiently described. Then the usual work and rest; and some tiffin is forthcoming about 3 P.M. From that time (and sometimes even in the mornings) visitors come with sweetmeats, fruits, candy, etc.; and after Swami takes a bit, these are at once distributed as *prasada* (blessed gift) to all present. Many new visitors to the Asram are agreeably surprised to taste the sweet bits which are always distributed as they come and the thorough equality and cordiality that characterise these gifts. The donor does not fancy himself superior to the recipient. It is "*Prasada*" going round; and all concerned have "*Prasanna manas*", *i.e.*, a happy and contented frame of mind. There is no trace of superiority or inferiority. Many newcomers wonder how it is possible for the Swami to be for ever giving them good things to eat, good example to copy, and good philosophy or philosophical explanations for them to take in and absorb, thereby promoting health, happiness and wisdom. The orthodox Hindu is directed to observe the scriptural direction to "bless the donor", *e.g.*, on receipt of food, to say from the bottom of his heart "अन्नदाता सुखीभव", "Happiness befall thee, donor of food!"

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At the close of the day comes "Meditation time" which, interrupted by a dinner (and sometimes by scriptural recitations), may extend to 9 P.M. or to the time for sleep. The importance of the subject demands a separate chapter.

[*Note* :—As Maharshi grew older this programme, which had been in force for so many years, became of necessity modified. It was essential that he should have more rest ; so the Asram authorities very wisely restricted the hours when visitors were allowed in his presence. In spite of this, until the last few weeks, he was open to all from five o'clock in the morning until seven-thirty at night, with an interval at mid-day for rest.—*Publisher.*]

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CHAPTER XXV

MEDITATION AT THE ASRAM

प्रणवो धनुः शरोह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते ।
अप्रमत्तेन वेद्धव्यं शरवत्तन्मयो भवेत् ॥
यस्मिन् द्यौः पृथिवी चान्तरिक्ष मोतं मनः सह प्राणैश्च सर्वैः ।
तमेवैकं जानथ आत्मान मन्यावाचो विमुञ्चथामृतस्यैष सेतुः ॥
अराइव रथनाभौ संहता यत्रनाडयः स एषोऽन्त श्चरते
बहुधा जायमानः ॥
ओमित्येवं ध्यायथ आत्मानं स्वस्तिवः पाराय तमसः
परस्तात् ॥

॥ मुण्डकोपनिषत् ॥ II, 2.

The Pranava (OM) is the bow; The arrow is (your) self; The target is the (Supreme) Brahman. Aim steadily, deliberately, and hit the mark. Like the arrow get imbedded, lost therein and become That.

In that (pranava), Earth and the Sky, intervening space, mind and all vital forces are interwoven. The one, Self is that. Realise that. From other talk, refrain. This is the bridge that leads to Immortality.

Meditate on Self as "OM." May you thus safely cross beyond darkness. (Mundaka. Upa. II, 2.)

MAHARSHI is regarded by many as a Sphynx. He speaks little and only as to what is asked. He is mostly silent. His works are cryptic and are capable of diverse interpretations. Saktas go to him and think he is a Sakta, Saiva take him for a Saiva, Srivaishnavas

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find nothing in him inconsistent with their Visishtadwaitic ideal. Moslems and Christians have found in him elements of their "true faith." Who can say what his faith is? Few are those, who have analysed and understood his attitude and realisation on matters of supreme, ultimate interest. More than twenty years back, Seshadriswami, a great *tapaswi*, with remarkable *vairagya* and high spiritual culture, tried in vain to see through this Swami. If the giant Seshadriswami with his extraordinary training, acuteness and powers of thought-reading could not make out his "mentality" or state, how can puny souls make it out? Yet having started on a biography one has to face the task. आरब्धस्यान्तगमनं द्वितीयं बुद्धिलक्षणम्, *i.e.*, "It is the next best mark of wisdom to complete what was begun."

The theory of meditation and Self-Realisation has been frequently set forth in books on Yoga and Vedanta, and clearly explained by Maharshi at least from 1901-02 onward as may be seen from G. Seshier's note-book and subsequent books. The instrument employed, at any rate, at the beginning is the *antakharana, i.e., manas, buddhi, chitta* and *ahankara, i.e., mind, intellect, desire* and *personality*, the totality of which is often termed the mind. This instrument has to be improved and developed and given the most favourable conditions for the task before it. The mind unaccustomed to concentrate must be bent to that task constantly, so that concentration may become easy and natural. Frequently steadying one's mind on a particular point when diverse other attractions or distractions operate on the senses and mind will enable one to concentrate even in a fish market.

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Favourable conditions are, however, necessary in the case of beginners, and must be first attended to diligently. These can be dispensed with later. First the place selected must be clean, peaceful, and free from all distracting noise. That is why a forest, hill, river bank, cave or corner of a temple is generally chosen. Even a quiet room in one's house will do. Next, a firm seat is made, not too high, (for fear of a fall) nor too low, (for fear of damp, insects, etc.) As it is mentioned in Bhagavad Gita, Chapter VI, 10-15, a grass mat is spread or a grass bundle is laid flat; over it a deer-skin and over that again a cloth is spread. On this the aspirant sits in any posture convenient to him. But as far as possible the body must be kept erect in a seated posture. The mind must remain calm, unagitated by fear, sex or other attractions, or thoughts, or by fatigue, drowsiness, restlessness, etc.; especially one finds it necessary to regulate sleep and food, avoiding all excess, and to live a pure, good and simple life, on plain *satvic* fare. The thoughts must be brought under control.

The best way advised to keep off all distracting thoughts is to occupy the mind positively with some object of devotion like Sri Krishna's or Rama's figure, and intently concentrate on that alone. One must throw into this meditation one's entire heart without any reservation. The personality of the meditator must be merged in the thought (or form) chosen for meditation and disappear into it like an arrow-head into the target.* The breath becomes regulated and tranquil thereby; and one need not worry about it; enough that one is bent

*As described in Mundaka Upa. quoted at the head of this Chapter.

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on meditation. But where a man lacks earnestness and force of personality, and is much distracted by conflicting currents of thought,—especially thoughts of worldly temptations, *e.g.*, कामिनी कांचन, यशः सुखं. *i.e.*, sex, wealth, fame, pleasure etc., he may call to his aid breath regulation for a period; attention to breath regulation, especially to the retention of breath for a fixed period, will smooth his ruffled mind. But as *Pranayama* is a mere step in aid of a great purpose, Maharshi frequently reminds people not to waste much time and effort on that to the detriment of the main objective (*Lakshya*), viz., self-realisation.

The question what exactly is to be meditated on, is frequently put to Maharshi by his disciples and others. He often allows them to select whatever they have previously taken up as their *Lakshya* or object for meditation. Anything will do. If a man has already started meditation on God Ganapati, Subrahmanya, Kali, Siva, Rama, Jesus, Buddha, Pranava, Sakti bijam, Panchakshari, Ashtakshari, a lamp's flame, his mother or his guru, Maharshi tells him to go on with it with full faith, as that will ultimately lead him to the goal. But to him who comes with what is practically a mental *tabula rasa* without any practice, or predilections, he advises the adoption of his own method. Follow intently the quest "Who am I?" In an earlier chapter are given some steps in the quest (which admit of description) leading to Self-Realisation (which admits of none). Inquire first how you think of "I" or yourself. Most people adopt the cut and dried analysis of one's self as body and soul: the body includes the organs and senses, the

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breath and other vital activities, the term soul or mind includes sensation, perception, memory, judgment and all mental operations.

No apology is offered for repeating here the pith and core of Maharshi's teaching. To understand and appreciate him one has to get a good grip of his theory and actually practise it: it is a matter which has to be dinned into one times without number, before one can hope to make much progress.

The question then is "Am I this body, this fleshy cage, these senses?" Obviously he is not these, as he parts with these piecemeal or wholesale and yet retains his feeling of self. At any rate "I" cannot remain after death! some one may remark. Well, "Death of what? What is it that dies?" Most people agree that they pass on from one body to another after death. Some people have experience even in this life of leaving their bodies in sleep, visiting distant scenes, noting what occurs there and, after waking up verifying the truth of the dream. Others are made to do this through hypnotic trance. These and similar facts enable a man to infer that the body, breath, life and vital activities are not his self, though he is apt to identify himself with his physical or animal life (as in fact he often identifies himself erroneously with the body).

If the body and life are not the self, a person may perhaps conclude that he must be his mind or mental modes. At any rate this is coming nearer the mark. But taking mind to mean the sum total of his thoughts, he feels almost instinctively that he is not his thoughts. A

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person feels "I entertain the thoughts, push them out, again give them room to re-enter. I send out and select various thoughts" and may well conclude that these thoughts do not mean my self but are mere objects with which the self, the subject, is sporting. But even the subject seems to be a thought or inextricably inter-mixed with thoughts. So he should first try and eliminate purely objective thoughts in his quest. All thoughts other than "I" may thus be regarded as objective and as much outside the Self as the external world is. The question then is: What is the residuary subject, this stem, or root thought "I," which is termed personality? Having already belittled the intellect by including it among the objects he is faced with the question whether the intellect can throw light on the nature of this "I". To some extent it can. When object after object is eliminated with the remark "This is but an object, a possession of the self, a thing which rises and falls, which changes, passes away and returns, and which is consequently not 'I' and not the Real" (*i.e.*, with the remark नेति नेति "Not this." "Not this"), the intellect is playing its part and rendering service. This service is exhausted with this negative course, this cleansing of the room (*i.e.*, its "purifiction") to fit it for the "occupation," or the "coming" of the Pure Self. The final service of the intellect is to eliminate itself, saying "I too am only the instrument of the subject and am not the subject itself."

The pure Self is not sensed by the intellect. The eye sees not the Self, though the Self sees all else with the eye. The intellect is similar therefore to the physical eye which sees only outside things. In some very extra-

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ordinary cases, the eye, so to speak, is turned round on itself. That is the "आवृत्तचक्षुः (introverted eye) spoken of in Katha. Upa. II 4(1). Strictly speaking, it is not the eye nor the intellect that sees the Self, but the Self sees, rather knows, Itself. We shall not try to describe what is indescribable. Seers have long ago declared that speech retires baffled in its attempt to describe the Self (*vide* Taitti. Upa. 114 यतोवाचो निवर्तन्तेअप्राप्य मनसा सह). So we content ourselves with a description of the preliminaries of meditation and leave the reader to realise the rest by himself. The mother when is questioned by her little girl, what the joys and pains of maternity and child-birth are like, smiles and says: "Wait and see for yourself by your own experience." The "birth" of this Atman, *i.e.*, its realisation in one's self and all, as pure 'bliss-consciousness-existence' can be understood only by actual experience.

But the external circumstances of meditation can be set down here in greater detail. What the visitor who stays a while with a view to catch a glimpse of the inner life of the Asram observes, what makes it worth his while visiting, may be described here at some length.

Most visitors have noticed that Maharshi seldom talks. When visitors come he just notes who come and keeps on his "contemplative" attitude. His eyes are fixed, his breath is even, and his mind is evidently in *Samadhi*. If the visitor comes for getting help to settle his own thoughts and dive into himself, Maharshi stops talking and gives him the needed tip or help. As Maharshi has often said that the proximity of great ones is one of the means to

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attain breath regulation (*Kumbhaka*). The great ones in their peaceful meditation maintain rythmic breathing. Those who intently watch them with a view of attaining *Samadhi*, imitate them consciously or unconsciously; and their breath and mind fall in line. This very soon leads to shaking off all cares, worries and disturbing influences and preparing for the inward plunge. Numerous devotees (or followers) of Maharshi have described this process from their own experience. Several people say that whereas they find contemplation hard in their own homes, temples, river-sides, tanks, etc., yet if they sit before him in the hall, all cares are dispelled and distracting currents cease —such is his grace towards them. Some of them say that they sat before him, and in a few moments attained *Antar-mukha drishti i.e.*, the inward vision, which later became habitual.

Several devotees do not go there to talk or ask questions, they are happiest when no visitors carry on any talk and Maharshi sits still in *Samadhi* giving them the lead for their own *Samadhi*. They are those who have been working on the lines recommended by him, *i.e.*, Atma Vichara (pursuing the quest "Who am I?"). Once Kapali Sastri asked him if a disciple can go to more than one Guru without detriment to his progress. Maharshi answered that he could, provided the current of thought of all the Gurus is substantially the same. This explains why those pursuing Maharshi's line of preparation for Samadhi find his presence so helpful—the very atmosphere of his hall being full of the quest "Who am I?"

Several of these have been advised what to shun in the course of their concentration. They have had

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"photisms" *i.e.*, seen light in various shapes and forms—like the sun, the moon, lightning, golden discs, etc., with their eyes closed or open and been warned that no time ought to be wasted on such. Not having reached the intuitive feeling of the Self at that stage, their duty is to push on deliberately brushing aside these lights (*'kalas,' 'chit-kalas,' 'jyoti'* etc., they are termed) or sounds (*Nada*) heard within, till they reach the Self by intuition. Sometimes instead of these lights divine forms like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Siva, Subrahmanya, Mother Sakti etc., appear. Maharshi's advice has been that even when these appear one should not stop one's efforts for realisation, or crave for boons. These forms are subjective like other phenomena—only more glorious. All the same if they raise desires in the aspirant or divert him from the pursuit of the Self, they become hindrances, which the wise would be well advised to ignore and push on towards Self-realisation in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi,* where no forms and no activity of the senses in any shape persists.

This advice should not be interpreted as lacking reverence for these divine Forms. Maharshi includes his own form also. The last stanza in Swetasvatara Upanishad (यस्यदेवेपराभक्तिः etc.) warns the pupil that the teachings of the Upanishads will bear little fruit unless the pupil has great reverence for God and equal reverence for the Guru (who is identified with God). So the object mostly selected by his devotees for contemplation is Maharshi himself. They either gaze at him or at his photograph for that purpose, or merely think of his image, with the consequence that his form appears transfigured often in brilliant light, which the pupil invariably reports

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to Maharshi, who then counsels him to put aside all form and to remember that what is seen is perishable, that what has an origin must also have an end, and that what has to be realised is the intuitive perception of the I, the Self, and not anything seized by the senses or by the intellect. Maharshi does not ignore the value of concentration on a physical form. That is the invaluable intermediate step. That must be stressed to the beginner equally as the other points: place, time, food and sleep-regulation. But when one has gained a high rung it is time to look ahead, throwing away the ladder by which one rose so high. The highest is not yet reached. The one thing needed is not yet gained. Self has yet to be realised.

So far mention has been made of how Maharshi helps the ordinary run of devotees who visit him. A few who are more finely strung, perhaps more delicately attuned, mention their experiences with him, which cannot be adequately described to one who has not had a similar experience. Some say that at a glance of Maharshi or because of his mere presence (*vide e.g.*, the entries in the diary of Ramaswamy Iyer Ch. XVI) a current from him entered their heart and greatly assisted them in mind and body. Some say that Maharshi, in order to instruct them about the working of "the Heart" which is said to be the seat of intuition, or Self, has asked them to place their palm on his right* breast where they felt the rhythm of this peculiar heartbeat. Some of them felt something like an electric shock coursing through their entire body at the very touch of his body. Whether these phenomena

* See Ullathu Narpathu Supplement.

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are subjective or objective, the results have been the same in their spiritual course. Some disciples say that they derived similar benefit by their bodies being touched by Maharshi when he appeared before them in dreams or waking visions.

When Maharshi renders such aid to occasional visitors, one may easily gather that he gives no mean help to the resident disciples whose chief delight and occupation is to serve at the Asram. Their very service is a great help to their progress. All the time they are cooking or watering the garden, cutting vegetables or running errands, whatever their body may be engaged in, they intently think of Maharshi as their God, their sole refuge, and refer to, or address him as "Bhagavan" (God) with intense faith. When they get occasional spells of leisure, for some moments or hours, they sit by his side and try to fall into *samadhi*, or ask him for any guidance they require. Sometimes they spend their leisure hours in intellectual preparation and development of faith, by learning the import of his compositions: *Upadesa Sara, Ullathu Narpathu, Arunachala Stotra, Devikalottara, Dakshinamurthi Ashtaka*, etc., and by reciting them before him in sonorous Tamil along with songs of praise skilfully interwoven with his teachings.* Maharshi listens right through and corrects any errors in the recitation. Early morning when he wakes up and sits in his seat, meditation is often resumed by the disciples. Some may begin with "திருப்பள்ளியெழுச்சி" (*i.e.*, awakening the Lord) imitating the praises of God sung at such hours in temples and at

*As in Ramana Sannidhimurai, by Muruganar; Ramana Stuti Panchakam, by Satyamangalam Venkatrama Iyer, etc.

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Bhajanas, and then proceed as at night to sing his poems describing the spiritual course—specially the *Samadhi* state. These invaluable hours of meditation or communion, night and morning, are highly prized by the resident disciples, who often continue to meditate by Maharshi's seat even when he is asleep or away.

Sometimes Maharshi and disciples sit up, especially after the night meal, reading books like *Ribhugita,* and *Kaivalya Navaneetha,* each by turn reading a verse or a set of verses. The books read are mostly very easy to follow ; and in places Maharshi puts in a word or two to make the meaning or its application clear. The reading continues for two hours or more at a stretch, and occasionally a whole night. "These readings," he says, "from *Ribhugita* are as good as *samadhi.*" Evidently such a continuous reading (following the meaning intently) induces *samadhi.* In fact, page after page, nay line after line, of *Ribhugita* merely goes on rubbing into one the nature of the Self. With a constant study of such works the mind easily gets into the "*mood of samadhi.*" The words keep ringing in the ears or in the heart for a long while after study. It is exactly for that reason that he encourages constant recitation of his works. His words, phrases and ideas thus soak into their minds ; and they can easily catch any further hints and instructions he may give; and all these permeate their subconscious mind, ripen there and produce highly desirable results in the long run.

The description of meditation given thus far may give the impression that *Nirguna Dhyana* (*i.e.,* meditation

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without form) is practically the only thing that obtains at the Asram. This would however be inaccurate. No doubt identification with *Nirguna* Brahman is the ultimate end and aim of all efforts. But the veteran with forty years of experience, knows full well, that for most people, formless contemplation (*Nirguna dhyana*) is an almost impossible feat; and these are advised to meditate on forms (*Saguna dhyana*) with or without the aid of images or pictures etc., according to the previous training, ideas or circumstances of each *sadhaka*.

A party of vakils, vakil *gumastas* (clerks) and others from Salem accompanied Vallimalai Murugar, (Tiruppugazh Swami) to see Maharshi about December 1925. Vallimalai Murugar himself spends all his time singing Tiruppugazh (*i.e.*, praises of God Subrahmanya) composed by the poet Arunagirinatha almost entirely devoted to meditation on form. Maharshi found him years ago repeating it very impressively with great musical talent but without understanding its meaning. Maharshi patiently sat and taught Murugar the meaning of Tiruppugazh; and now the latter (who has no other education but this) is able to expound Tiruppugazh even to Tamil graduates and clear their doubts. It is *Saguna dhyana* that he practised and Maharshi by his exposition enabled him to pursue it more effectively. At the same time Maharshi was requested by the Salem group to explain how they were to derive any benefit from the *Gayatri*, which every *Brahmin* daily mutters many times, and whether it was to be construed literally. "Yes," Maharshi said, "there is no harm, but real good results in starting Gayatri dhyana taking the *Savitá* as the orb of the Sun at first." He also approved

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of the use of the closing mantra "नमस्सवित्रेजगदेकचक्षुषे etc. of the daily *Japa* to guide one in meditation. The orb is viewed as the one eye of the universe, the source, the sustainer and the end of all existence, the embodied form of the Vedic, *i.e.*, spiritual, wisdom, the fountain of all (gunas) attributes, the soul of the Triad: Brahma the Creator, Narayana the Upholder, and Sankara, or Siva, the Withdrawer of the universe. The meditation is on that threefold yet unitary Being who resides in the centre of the solar orb, seated on a lotus decked with ornaments of *burnished* gold, bearing the resplendent crown of imperial power, (his entire body also shining like molten gold) holding in his palms the mighty conch, (a spiral, symbolising space, wherein the worlds are ever rotating), the terrible, flaming discus, (*chakra,* or wheel, significant of Time wherein all creation is held, shaped and transformed) and the weapon *Gadha,* typifying omnipotence. Thus God is to be intently thought of as omnipotent, omnipresent, all-pervasive, infinite, eternal; and by perpetual contemplation one finally sinks one's individuality in God. If the votary is earnest he need not have anxieties about the correctness or the form of his meditation. He has trusted it to an omniscient power. Does not that power know what is good for the votary and will he not bestow it? Intensity of devotion converts the finite form on which the devotee begins to mediate into an infinitely vast formlessness. *Saguna* thus easily glides into *Nirguna.*

"Every one according to his liking," is the motto at Ramanasram, a "Liberty hall"; and various disciples place before Maharshi their special inclinations towards meditation. A *Sakta* wants advice about his line and gets

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it. One very keen on *mantras** with intent to achieve worldly, albeit altruistic, and highly ambitious aims, asks advice on the way in which he is to carry on his *japa*†, or how the power presiding over the *mantra* attracts, or is attracted by, the *Japakarta*‡, and how the current generated in the exercise works, etc. Maharshi enters into that line of thought and gives the answers suitable to that devotee's view point; and when the latter sits up for meditation according to that point of view, Maharshi sits in Samadhi and lends him thus a helping hand.

When people require assistance not merely in the choice of a *Dhyana Murti, i.e.,* a form to meditate upon, but also in the selection of particular passages of sacred works wherein such meditation is set out, Maharshi, whose knowledge of such matters is extensive, picks out particular passages from sacred scripts to suit all. Passages abound in the Vedas and the Upanishads, describing the heart as the seat of God and God as residing therein as light (vide *Purusha Sukta*) of the size of the thumb. See Katha. Upa. II. 4 12. अङ्गुष्ठ मात्रः पुरुषो मध्य आत्मनि तिष्ठति ॥ 13. अङ्गुष्ठमात्रः पुरुषो ज्योतिरिवाधूमकः God is again described as floating on the waters, *i.e.,* the ocean (of milk or water), or as appearing in the form of a hill or of a river flowing down from the hill (अद्रिज): He is described as the entire universe (विराट्). Maharshi as already stated gives the disciple a free choice of forms, mantras and passages like these for contemplation.

Several people have asked Maharshi from time to time for help (especially in directing their meditation) to

* Mystic sounds. † Incantation. ‡ The chanter.

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overcome various cravings and thus to prepare themselves ultimately for self-realisation. In W. James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 262, the instance of Col. Gardiner is given to show how a person who was a veritable slave to sexual craving suddenly became master of himself and freed for ever from it, together with instances of others who similarly overcame love of drink, anger, etc. Disciples have requested Maharshi's advice for similar conquests. There are some detailed considerations in Sri Sankara's भजगोविन्दं or मोहमुद्गर *e.g.*, "Deem this body a nasty bundle of flesh, serum, etc., and do not be enamoured of this"; "when you are impatient and wroth with me or another, remember you are wroth with God who is in you, in me and in all." There are stinging passages in the poems of Pattanathupillai and others which similarly make one feel disgust for sexual craving and wealth. Maharshi does not generally give advice on these lines. He always goes to the root of the matter. "Aim high, aim at the highest; and all lower aims are thereby achieved," is his principle. If a person tries and learns the nature of the Self, where is lust or anger there to disturb him? But some disciples are only too conscious of their own weaknesses and feel that an immediate remedy for their troubles is required before aiming so high. Maharshi asks them not to look downwards at the stormy seas but to pass to the Self (Himself). "It is looking below on the stormy seas of differences that makes you sink in them. Look up beyond these, and see the one glorious Real, and you are saved," is his advice. "Have faith in God and in yourself: that will cure all," is his panacea for all ills. "Hope for the best, expect the best, toil for the best," he says, "and everything will

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come right in the end." Some do rise to the occasion and by acting on this advice, meditate straightway on the Self, and overcome their "defects of doubt and taints of blood." Many lines of Maharshi's "அருணமணமாலை" are found suitable by many bhaktas, while others may constantly repeat other passages full of excellent suggestions, *e.g.*,

"अन्नपूर्णे सदापूर्णे शंकरप्राणवल्लभे। ज्ञानवैराग्यसिद्धयर्थं भिक्षांदेहि च पार्वति"

"सर्वसमत्व सर्वहितत्वं सत्संगत्वं देहिविभोमे"

(1) O Goddess Parvati, consort of Siva, bounteous feeder, ever free for want (or also, perfect), give me alms, *viz.*, Wisdom (or Realisation) and non-attachment.

(2) Grant me, O Lord ! equality towards all, universal love and association with the spiritual Master.

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CHAPTER XXVI

LATER DEVOTEES

गुशब्दस्त्वन्धकारस्स्यात् रुशब्दस्तन्निरोधकः ।
अन्धकारनिरोधत्वाद्गुरुरित्यभिधीयते ॥

The syllable *Gu* denotes darkness; and *Ru* denotes dispelling of the same. Consequently He who dispels the darkness (of ignorance, and imparts illumination), is styled the *Guru*.

मनश्चेन्न लग्नं गुरोरङ्घ्रिपद्मे ततःकिं ततःकिं ततःकिं ततःकिम्

If the mind is not reverently merged into the feet of the Master (Guru) what good is there, what good indeed in possessing or achieving anything else?

RAMANA Maharshi's highly esteemed position and numerous following render him a power in social and religious matters. The question has often been raised in what direction this power has been and is exercised. A living soul cannot be analysed, dissected and discussed with as much freedom and detachment as a departed hero. A few points however can be noted even about a living subject; and the reader has probably a right to get some idea of the personality, the character and special features of the subject he is studying.

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Maharshi avoids controversies—social, religious and political. Yet one cannot move among hundreds of persons every day without taking some stand on important issues. The basic principles of Maharshi's saintly life—*Ahimsa, Samatva and Sarvahitatva, i.e.,* harmlessness, equality, and universal benevolence, naturally lead him to approve of the liberalising and humanising aspects of social reform. Members of the depressed classes have long been his immediate attendants and are being treated as though they belonged to the higher classes. The question was raised in 1917 whether women and Sudras were fit to be given Vedic teaching and to be inducted into the mysteries of Self-Realisation. Maharshi, without any hesitation, answered in the affirmative and has in practice imparted instruction to women, Sudras, Harijans and non-Hindus whatever the Brahma-sutras and the commentaries thereon might say. The tendency of spiritual aspirants has generally been to shun society, not merely in the initial stage of preparation but even later. Maharshi on the other hand is fully in sympathy with the tendency of present-day ethics to stress social service rather than the perfection of the individual ascetic in isolation, and notes the importance of society even for the perfection of individual character. When Yoganatha asked him whether a man should prefer *Santi* (peace in solitude) to *sakti* (*i.e.,* the power to render service to one's community or society), Maharshi pointed out that the path to peace runs through social service, that a man should develop his full power to serve the society in which he is born before he can fall into a life wholly absorbed in the Self. He himself sets an excellent example of social service every day. People who visit the Asram and watch

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him stitching leafplates, cutting vegetables, reading proofs or papers and helping people in distress, learn a valuable social and spiritual lesson. S., a local teacher, was taught two such lessons years ago. On one occasion he felt vexed with himself at not rising to Maharshi's spiritual standard of excellence and absented himself for many long months from the Asram saying to himself "I shall not go up to Maharshi till I can think and act like him, *i.e.*, till I get his Vairagya (Dispassion), etc." But long absence from Maharshi's presence did not improve him. On the other hand it rendered him more worldly and less spiritual. Disgusted with these results, he climbed up to the Maharshi who received him with a significant laughter which meant "little half-fledged birds that try too early to fly from their nests fall. Why should a man try his flights prematurely and fancy he can conquer the world before he is fully prepared and developed?" That was the significance of his laughter; and S. gave up his premature attempts to escape from society. On a later occasion S. was worried with numerous vexations that befall house-holders who are not the pets of fortune, and was disgusted with social life; he was strongly tempted to leave the town and family and take to asceticism. Anyhow he felt that he must consult Maharshi beforehand and went to see him. Maharshi was engaged in stitching leafplates, and before S. expressed his troubles, told him the moral lessons derived from leaf stitching: "You see with how much trouble we stitch up and preserve a leafplate. Then it serves its purpose. *After* that purpose is served, and only after that, it is thrown away. Just so with the body. It has to be looked after till the self is realised." S. was thus taught that he should not so readily

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succumb to ordinary trials and vexations and think of abandoning his post before rendering the service for which his body came into existence.

Persons often approach Maharshi with the question whether spirituality is consistent with an active domestic or social life. He asks them: "Was Rama spiritually advanced, and was he leading a house-holder's life?" Raghavachar, the Supervisor, was coming to Maharshi off and on; and his wife and mother feared that he might give up his social duties and become a recluse. They went and told Maharshi of their fears. Maharshi consequently admonished him about the dangers of becoming a recluse without the severe training required for it. He has given similar advice to numerous others also. Maharshi's own example induces many to quit family life. Every year a dozen or more persons run away from their homes and go to Ramanasram in the hope that they may become Ramanas themselves. These are mostly moved by a passing wind of disgust with social life (Vairagya). Their ardour soon cools down by the warning and dissuasion from the Asram; and they go back sadder and wiser. A few however are more resolute and withstand all dissuasion; they prove eminent exemplars for those who wish to begin a strenuous spiritual career with rigorous (*tapas*) austerities in solitude or holy company. A few of these who attached themselves to Maharshi may be appropriately described in this chapter, as their lives illustrate one side of Maharshi's influence.

In 1917, Natanandar (then known as Natesa Mudaliar), an elementary school teacher, read with great interest the teachings of Swami Vivekananda in respect

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to Jnana, (*i.e.*, path of inquiry), and wished to give up his married life and become a recluse. He proceeded to search for a suitable Guru, and inquired of many if there was any living Guru who could instruct and inspire as Sri Ramakrishna inspired and instructed Vivekananda. "Yes, there is one," several said, "and that is Sri Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai." "But," some added, "getting *upadesa* from him is a well-nigh hopeless task." Nothing daunted N., went up soon afterwards (*i.e.*, in 1918) to Maharshi at the Skandasram and sat in silence before him. He dared not ask any question; and the Swami did not deign to open conversation. So he felt that his friends were right in their judgment about the impossibility of getting *upadesa* (instruction) from this Swami, and returned dejected. His determination to obtain his special grace however was by no means abandoned. Difficulties of obtaining, or the rarity of, the desired object only strengthened his resolve. "A Sat-Guru must be found. Are there any others?" thought he, and went to see some reputed ascetics. But they did not impress him; and he could not surrender himself as a disciple at their feet. So back again his mind flew to Maharshi; and the only question was, how his grace could be obtained. So in 1920, he wrote a letter at great length placing before the Maharshi the example of Tayumanavar who had written "காகமுறவு கலந்துண்ணக் கண்டீர்" (see, crows are selfless and share their grub with their kind) . . . and of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa; requested him not to be selfishly indifferent to the fate of longing souls, and added that his previous visit was fruitless, and that if Maharshi should deign to give written permission, he (N.) would at once go to his feet etc. A month passed without

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the receipt of a reply. So he next sent a registered letter (with acknowledgment paid) to Maharshi. Therein he stated "Whatever the number of re-births I have to endure, still I am resolved to get my *Upadesa* (*i.e.*, instruction) from you, and you alone. So you (Maharshi) on this account must be reborn if you give me up in this birth as unprepared or too immature to receive your instruction. I swear to this." A few days after this Maharshi appeared in a dream and said to him, "Do not constantly think of me: you have first to secure the favour of God Maheswara, the Lord of the Bull. First meditate on Him and secure His grace. My help will follow as a matter of course." Thenceforward he meditated upon Maheswara as riding on a bull, of whom he had pictures at home. A few days later a letter was received from Vasudeva Sastri saying: "Your two letters received. Maharshi does not reply to letters. You can come and see him in person." After ascertaining by a fresh letter who Sastri was, and if the reply was written at Maharshi's bidding, N. went up to Tiruvannamalai. Following the direction in the dream, he spent that night at the temple after getting *darsan* of Arunachaleswara (*i.e.*, Maheswara). The same night a local Brahmin, learning his purpose tried to dissuade him: "Well, sir, I have spent sixteen years in vain with Ramana Maharshi trying to get his 'Anugraham' (grace). He is so indifferent. Even if you break your head there, he will not care or inquire why. So his 'Anugraham', being impossible of attainment your visit to him will bear no fruit." But N. did not yield to this view. Then the Brahmin said: "Anyhow, if you are going to be so lucky as to get his *upadesam*, you can test it this way. There is a saint here of the

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name 'Seshadri' who mixes with none and lets none approach him. He mostly beats off people from approaching him; if you can get some favour from him, then that will be good augury for the success in store for you." So next morning N. and J. V. Subrahmanya Iyer (a fellow-teacher at Anantapuram) set out in quest of this wild bird, Seshadri Swami. The quest was in vain for a long while, but at last Seshadri came and instructed N. thus:

"ஐயையோ குழந்தாய்! ஏன் மனதைப் புண்படுத்திக் கவலைப்படவேண்டும்? ஞானம் ஞானம் என்றால் என்ன? எது எது அநித்தியமோ, அதை யெல்லாம் புத்தியால் நீக்கி, எது நீக்கமுடியாமல் மிஞ்சுகிறதோ அதுதான் ஞானம். அதுதான் தெய்வம்; எல்லாம் அதுதான். மலையிலே போனால்தான் ஞானம்வரும், குகையில் போனால்தான் ஞானம்வரும என்று அங்குமிங்கும் அலைவது பைத்தியம்தான், பயப்படாதே. போ."

"Alas, child! Why are you heart-sore and anxious? What is *Jnana* (Wisdom)? After the mind rejects objects one after another as transcient and unreal, that which survives is *Jnana*. That is God. Everything is that and that alone. It is madness to run hither and thither in the belief that *Jnana* can be attained only by going to a hill or to a cave. Go without fear."

This was clearly a happy augury. Full of joy, N. went up-hill to Maharshi that very noon, bowed and sat before him. For five or six hours no words passed between him and the Swami. Just as Swami was about to leave the place for his meal, J. V. Iyer told him, pointing to N. "This is the person who wrote the letters." Maharshi

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carefully looked at him twice and went away. N. visited the Asram off and on, every month without opening his lips to question Maharshi, for this was what he felt about Maharshi :—

"Others abide our question—Thou art free ;
We ask and ask. Thou smilest and art still ;
Out-topping knowledge."

"Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured and self-secure
Dost walk on earth unguessed at."

A year later N. opened his mouth and asked Maharshi: "I wish to learn and experience what your *Anugraham* is, as people differ in their accounts of it." Maharshi replied : "I am always giving my *Anugraham*. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do ?" N. discovered thereby that his silent *Samadhi* (*i.e.*, ecstatic state) was itself "Anugraham" which all aspirants should imitate, contact, and get into. Still the "*mounam*" state was not clear to him ; and he was troubled over it. Some friends advised him to concentrate on some object or deity. He did not however agree to that course, as he had read Tayumanavar who sang* that குணம் (attributes) and குறி (symbol or object *i.e.* characteristics) should be transcended in meditation. Some days later Maharshi appeared to him in a dream and said :—

*கற்றதும் கேட்டதுந்தானே யேதக் காகக்
கடபடமென் றுருட்டுதற்கோ கல்லாலெம்மான்
குற்றமறக் கைகாட்டுங் கருத்தைக் கண்டு
குணங்குறியற் றின்பவிட்டை கூட வன்றே.

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"இரு கண்களின் பார்வையையும் ஏகப்படுத்தி புறத்தி லும் லக்ஷியம் வைக்காமல் திருஷ்டியை சமப்படுத்திக்கொண்டு அப்பியசி."

"Let your vision be unified and withdrawn from objects external or internal. Differences thus disappearing, get on."

N. took the advice to mean that he should see with the physical eye as directed, and replied, "This does not seem to me a proper course. If such a superior person like you should give me this advice, who will give me true advice?" Then Maharshi swore that it was the true course, which he had indicated, and added: "Your doubt is not however wrong. Try this for a short while; by this means you will attain the Self-state."

N. thus describes his next step:

"I followed this dream-*Upadesa* for a while. Then I had another dream in which Maharshi appeared to me while my father was by. Maharshi asked me, pointing to my father, 'Who is this?' With some hesitation about the philosophical accuracy of the answer, I said: 'This is my father.' Maharshi smiled at me significantly, and I added: 'My answer is in accordance with common parlance and not with philosophy, because I am not the body.' Maharshi drew me near to him and placed his palm first on my head and next on my right breast, pressing his finger over the nipple. It caused some pain, but as it was his *Anugraham*, I endured it quietly. I did not know then why he pressed the right breast and not the

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left. I awoke at once." N. gathered from the above that the question about the father was with a view to make him give up completely his *Dehatmabuddhi* (*i.e.*, his identification of himself with the body), and that the touch on the head and breast was *Hastha Diksha* (*i.e.*, the transmission of grace or *Anugraham* by the touch of the Guru's palm) over the disciple's "Heart."

Sometime later N. came again to Maharshi. Some highly gifted persons were comparing notes with the Swami, of their advanced experiences in matters spiritual, *i.e.*, in the highest reaches of the soul's flight. Sitting very near and drinking in every word through his ears, N. was aghast. The words he heard were easy, well known Tamil or Sanskrit words. But their sense was far above him. The talk was all far, far above him. A great sorrow overwhelmed his soul. "Shall I or shall I ever, have these experiences, now or in any future birth?" Thus he thought within himself. His dejection must have caught the master's keen eye; as, after the visitors left, Maharshi said to him: "Why are you anxious? What you seek is that which is always ready (Siddha) at hand. Can any one feel anxiety whether he will get what exists always? Do you feel just now that you have not got possession of it, *i.e.*, that it is not in the palm of your hand? If it is not clear to-day it will be clear to you to-morrow. Why should you be downcast over such a matter? If you were really unfit to have it, how could the thought of seeing great ones have occurred to you?" Peace entered his soul immediately.

Maharshi's grace has been showered on N. and his family by means of dreams. All members of that family

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would go to Tiruvannamalai and wait on Maharshi with faith. Maharshi knew the depth of N's emotion on each occasion. But sometimes he would test the strength of his resolve before granting him his wishes.

Thus about 1926 N. approached the Swami and said that he desired to become a hermit, as that seemed the only course for him, since domestic life was standing in the way of achieving peace and control of mind. Maharshi tried to dissuade him, and pointed out that if one quitted home to escape a single hindrance and go to the forest ten hindrances would beset him there, as though they came up on purpose to test his mettle. "But do not ask me, why I came," said the Swami. "Somehow I came then." And he quoted "மஹாராஜா துறவு" (A king's non-attachment), and said the *Maharaja* when he left home and all, no doubt said, "தென்திசை நடப்போர் கங்கை சென்று தோய்ந்திடுவரோதான், ... இல்லில் நிற்பவர் முத்திசேரார்." *i.e.*, "If a man goes southwards he will never go to the Ganges. Similarly one who stays at home will never obtain salvation." But the same *Maharaja* at a later stage said that there was no difference between domestic life and a hermit's. "Just as you avoid cares of home when you are here," said the Swami, "go home and try to be equally unconcerned and unaffected in the midst of home life." N. got the same negative reply on two or three later occasions, when he again broached the subject of *Sanyasa*. Maharshi's words proved to be quite prophetic. N. with an impetuosity which no doubt did credit to his heart, put on Kashayam and became a sanyasi. But he was prevailed upon after a few years to resume his place as a householder and work for his family as a teacher in

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a school. The favour of Maharshi was shown to him by ready and illuminating answers to his numerous questions. These were just hinted at in N.'s poems sung in praise of the Maharshi (*viz.*) "ரமணநோத்திர மஞ்ஜரி, "ரமணநோத்திர சோடசம்," "ரமணநான்மணிமாலை," "ரமண அந்தாதி," "ரமண சதகம்" etc., and set out more clearly in his recent catechism, "உபதேச மஞ்ஜரி" which embodies not merely replies given to him, but also to others.*

One among the favours shown by Maharshi to N.'s family (all of whom have sincere faith in him) may be singled out and narrated here. His eldest brother went to Maharshi some five years back, and sat in his presence thinking within himself thus: "They say that this Maharshi has *Iswaramsa* (*i.e.*, Divine qualities) in him. If so, he ought to divine my thought and teach me *Atma Swarupam* (the nature of God) without my questioning him." He did not put any question. Maharshi, who never gives a man any instruction unless questioned, began addressing him on the nature of the *Atman*. This was an instance of Maharshi's thought-reading and his kindness towards earnest aspirants.

Before closing this chapter we may briefly sketch some typical recluses, or devotees who have left their homes and relatives and sought the feet of Ramana Maharshi for further guidance, *viz.*, Ramanathier, a teacher, and a disciple who, despite his development of *vairagya*, still continued to lead a householder's life, retaining some social contact.

* These talks were later translated into English and published under the title "Cathechism of Instruction".—*Publisher.*

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Ramanathier was an elementary school teacher in a village in Tanjore district. He developed faith in Ramana Maharshi and visited Ramanasram, at first on holidays. He had read the works of Maharshi and the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. As his faith became more fervent he began to grow careless of his social obligations. He was past forty and had a wife and young children to maintain out of his earnings as a teacher. Yet when his faith grew, his sense of social duty suddenly gave way; and he frequently left his post and went on pilgrimages to Ramanasram and elsewhere. The first default was condoned by his superiors and he was restored to his post. But again he left his school and home and went to Ramanasram. There he sat in a dazed state before Maharshi, not speaking to any one—not even to Maharshi. He went on with his meditations in the Asram hall in a perfectly nude condition—evidently following Sri Ramakrishna's example and precept that one must free oneself from his sheaths, including dress, caste, etc. The Swami's disciples took exception to this practice and retied the cod-piece on him. Again at dead of night he moved out into the adjoining tank (Palitirtham) for his meditation. The disciples, afraid that he might get drowned, pulled him out and brought him to the hall. Again he went out into the darkness and sat up naked in the open ground beyond the Asram for his meditation. He was again reclothed and brought back to the hall lest cheetas that occasionally visit the Asram should attack him. Finally he was locked up in a cottage. Finding it impossible to look after him, one of the disciples took him to his village; but in a short time he returned to Tiruvannamalai and continued his nude and silent meditation at Pandava-

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tirtham at the foot of the Hill at some distance from the Asram. His wife and child went to Ramanasram and invited him home. Maharshi also advised him to attend to his social duties. But he had finally resolved to break away from domestic duties, and, discarding all solicitation and advice, is now wandering as a *mouni*, keenly intent on developing his *Vairagya* and *Jnana* (dispassion and illumination), living upon alms.

Yogi Ramiah belongs to the community of Reddiars and is a rich landed proprietor of Annareddipoliem, near Buchireddipoliem, Nellore District. He received hardly any education. Being the sole owner of his properties he had every inducement to pass his days merrily with his thoughtless companions, boys of his own age. But just at about the age of eighteen his thoughts took a serious turn on reading the life of Kabir and he gave up his former associates and took interest in religion. A Brahmin Guru imparted to him the Rama Taraka *mantram* and asked him to repeat it five thousand times daily. "If the number is exceeded, what then?" asked the ardent youth. "So much the better", was the Guru's reply. "If I repeat it always?" was the next querry. The Guru was delighted at the keenness of the disciple's enthusiasm and expressed warm approval. Ramiah went on with his *japam* from morning till night whatever he might be doing. He also practised breath control. Meantime *vairagya* or disgust with his worldly surroundings, waxed so strong in his breast that he suddenly left home to go north to perform *tapas* in some holy places like Kasi. On the way he met his Guru who asked him if he had obtained his mother's permission for the pilgrimage. When he admitted that he had not, the Guru sent him back to his village.

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"Go and do your *tapas* in the seclusion of your garden and I shall come later on and see how you progress," said the Guru. Ramiah returned and went on with his *tapas*. He developed both his breath regulation and meditation without any one to help him. He was able to remain several hours in a blissful mood beholding the tip of his nose, the breath being easily regulated and stilled. His mind was equally stilled and happy. Perfect continence, satvic food, just enough to keep his body and mind working, and intense devotion through his japa to God (Sri Rama) carried him soon to illumination in *Samadhi*. In his concentration of the mind assisted by the fixed gaze on the tip of the nose at first, and on the space between the eyebrows later, he experienced the vision of the Sun, the Moon and Sri Rama. These appeared and disappeared, and he felt that he was the seer and knower of these forms. As he continued his concentration all these disappeared and there was only the feeling of a bright something—like a curtain, beyond which there was nothing to experience. That subsisted right through (not coming and disappearing like the previously-mentioned forms); and That alone subsisted, for there was no separate knower or seer seeing or knowing it. Could the subject and object be after all identical? He asked local pandits about it. Their replies did not satisfy him. So he came to Tiruvannamalai and in Maharshi's presence asked Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri about it. "The subject is of course different from the object", was the pandit's reply. Ramiah was disappointed and looked up to Maharshi, who at once supplemented or corrected the pandit's reply. "Subject and object are distinct in the phenomenal world to the ordinary man. But in

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samadhi they merge and become one." Ramiah was very glad to get a corroboration of his experience from this eminent Swami. Thenceforward he took Maharshi as his sole guide. He is still going on with Yoga, *Mounam*, and *tapas*, to perfect his *Vasanakshaya* (*i.e.*, extinction of desires). He eats little, controls his breath and stays many hours at a stretch in blissful ecstasy, mostly in the cottage in his own garden, and also for a few months each year with Maharshi at Ramanasram. As Yogi Ramiah does not know Tamil, Maharshi translated his Tamil poems Upadesa Sara and Ullathu Narpathu into Telugu. Yogi Ramiah has appreciably helped in repairing Palitirtham, and in the construction of the Asram.

Another type attracted to Maharshi is Suddhananda Bharati. He was for long a prominent patriot working in the fields of Tamil literature, journalism, Gurukul education, social reconstruction and politics along with his fellow-worker, the late V. V. S. Iyer. In the midst of these multifarious activities he did not neglect religion. In fact for all his selfless work he wanted power and it is God as Sakti that appealed to him. The means he adopted then were chiefly the time-honored Pranayama and Tapas, which gave him brief spells of Nada, Kala and Laya (*i.e.* internal sounds, photisms, and the losing of oneself). His religion was however eclectic and catholic. With voracity he roamed over many places in quest of religious satisfaction, and moved intimately with Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians and Sikhs and studied their sacred writings and religious forms. It was while he was studying Jainism at Sravana Belagola (in the Mysore State) that the inner call of Ramana became intense. He had heard of Maharshi long before and felt

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attracted to him. But that was a bare spark, which took time to glow and blaze up as it did then. He went to Tiruvannamalai and saw Maharshi, who first appeared to him as a heap of sacred ashes, then as a Pillar of Fire, and next as Siva Linga, (thus). In that interview, Maharshi

was the first to speak. While Bharati bowed to K. K. G. Sastri, a few yards off, Maharshi said : "Bharati ! Is it the author of Bharata Sakti ?" which showed how keenly he had appreciated Bharati's works. Bharati felt happy at this recognition and condescension. Maharshi next invited him to breakfast, an invitation which was gladly accepted with the rider that it was for spiritual food from Maharshi that the visitor had come to the Asram. Bharati asked no questions and wanted no intellectual food. He simply feasted his eyes by constantly gazing on Maharshi, and rapidly composed many lines of Tamil verse in praise of Maharshi in the space of an hour on that very first visit.

Contact with Maharshi made him feel more introverted ; and his egotism sank so low that he began to refer to himself in the third person. In this way he spent six months (in 1929) at Tiruvannamalai and later went to Sri Aurobindo Asram, Pondicherry, where he evidently resumed his quest of "Sakti." There Sakti inspired him to ethereal flights of imagination and devotion and he wrote a brilliant piece of poetic prose in Tamil, *Ramana Vijayam* (the Life of Sri Ramana), every line of which breathes fervid devotion to Maharshi.

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Bhagavan SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

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Sri Maharshi with Sri Rajendra Prasad and Sri Jamnalal Bajaj.
***Photo taken on* 18—8—1938.**

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CHAPTER XXVII

A WESTERN DEVOTEE

AFTER the first edition of this book was published, people not only from other provinces of India, but also from the West have approached Maharshi, either in person or by letters to benefit themselves spiritually. One of them was a Western devotee or admirer, whose experience I shall narrate.

In 1934 there appeared a widely-read book, *A Search in Secret India** by Paul Brunton, which is a really interesting book of thrilling spiritual adventures, ending in the discovery of Maharshi and, through Maharshi, of the author himself. This and the following chapter are hardly anything more than an adaptation or extract of relevant portions of that book.

Paul Brunton was a successful English journalist, who interested himself in theosophy, spiritualism, hypnotism, thought reading, etc., and obtained some first-hand experiences in some of these fields. The serious side of his mind gradually developed to such an extent that he rejected a profitable journalistic proposal and started out to India in 1930 in quest of the unknown truth behind all life, as India

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was by all accounts the land where great mysteries and miracles were more common and more easily to be witnessed and experienced than in the West, and where sages were still to be found who could teach pupils, if duly qualified, not only the mysteries of Thaumaturgy, but the greatest of all mysteries, the mystery of existence and of life.

Here he went through various interesting experiences. After meeting the Egyptian sorcerer, Mahmoud Bey (at Bombay), the Parsi Messiah, Meher Baba (at Nasik) and his (M.B.'s) guru—Baba Jan (at Poona), and a Hatha Yogi, Brahma Sukhananda Rajagopalaswami (at Saidapet), he proceeded to Chingleput, where the Kanchipitam Sri Sankaracharya was camping, and requested His Holiness to give him enlightenment; but the latter directed him to go to Ramana Maharshi and privately informed his (P.B.'s) companion, Venkatramani, that though he (P.B.) would leave Maharshi and tour all India in quest of all sorts of things, he would finally return to Maharshi as Maharshi was the Guru marked out for him by destiny.

P. Brunton went to Tiruvannamalai, and after due prostration, sat in front of Maharshi, whom he found seated gazing in his usual, calm and serene manner, surrounded by devotees.*

At first P. B. wondered for a moment whether Maharshi's peace and serenity were a mere superficial pose for the benefit of his devotees; but soon shaking off that idea he became aware of a silent, resistless change taking place within his own mind.

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* *Cf.* supra, *i.e.*, उदासीनवदासीन in perfect indifference.

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A steady river of quietness seemed to flow near him, a great peace was penetrating the inner reaches of his being, and his thought-tortured brain was beginning to arrive at some rest. Suddenly and clearly he realised that the intellect created its own problems and then made itself miserable trying to solve them. Naturally this sudden peace and perception must be due to Maharshi's influence, said he to himself.

"Does this man, Maharshi, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals?" The peace and perception he enjoyed did not last long. They were evidently a mere foretaste and were soon withdrawn. His old intellectuality re-asserted itself. Later he asked Maharshi:

"Is there anything beyond man's material existence? If so, how can I realise it for myself?" That is, he wanted more light upon the truth behind life, and Maharshi's assistance to experience enlightenment.

After a pause Maharshi replied:

You say 'I.' 'I want to know.' Tell me who is that 'I'?

P. B.:—I am afraid I do not understand your question.

M:—Is it not clear? Think again!

Then P. B. pointed a finger towards his body (Rupa) and mentioned his name (Nama).

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M. :—And do you know him ?

P. B. (smiling) : All my life.

M. :—But that is only your body. Again I ask 'Who are you?' There is only one thing to be done. Look into your own self. Do this in the right way and you will find the answer to all your problems.

P. B. :—What must one do ? What method can I pursue ?

M. :—Through deep reflection on the nature of one's self and through constant meditation the light can be found.

P. B. :—I have frequently given myself up to meditation upon truth, but I see no signs of progress.

M. :—How do you know that no progress has been made ? It is not easy to perceive one's progress in the spiritual realm.

P. B. :—Is the help of a master necessary ?

M. :—It might be.

P. B. :—Can a master help a man to look into his own self in the way you suggest ?

M. :—He can give the man all that he needs for this quest. Such a thing can be perceived through personal experience.

P. B. :—How long will it take to get some enlightenment with a master's help ?

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M. :—It all depends on the maturity of the seeker's mind. The gunpowder catches fire in an instant, while much time is needed to set fire to the coal.

P. B.'s mind did not at once catch Maharshi's fire, but allowed his old problem to crop up and asked questions having no apparent bearing on Self-Realisation. Would Maharshi express an opinion on the future of the world, as we are living in critical times ?

M. :—Why should you trouble yourself about the future ? You do not even properly know the present ! Take care of the present ; the future will then take care of itself.

P. B. still anxious to have a prophecy on the world's future, returned to the attack but got a cold douche.

P. B. :—Will the world soon enter a new era of friendliness and mutual help, or will it go down into chaos and war ?

M. :—There is one who governs the world, and it is His look-out to look after the world. He who has given life to the world knows how to look after it also. He bears the burden of this world, not you.

P. B. :—Yet if one looks around with unprejudiced eyes, it is difficult to see where this benevolent regard comes in.

M. :—As you are, so is the world. Without understanding yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world ? This is a *question that seekers after truth need not consider. People waste their energies* over all such questions. First, find out the truth in yourself ;

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then you will be in a better position to understand the truth behind the world, of which yourself are a part.

Later P. B. while yet before Maharshi falls into a half sleep, lulled by the intangible peace which, in the sage's proximity, begins to penetrate him more deeply. Ultimately there comes a gap in his consciousness and then a vivid dream. He finds himself a little boy, who is taken up the Arunachala hill by Maharshi. Then in the dream Maharshi turns and looks down into his face; and he, in turn, gazes expectantly up at Maharshi and becomes aware of a mysterious change taking place with great rapidity in his heart and mind. The old motives which had lured him on begin to desert him.

Suddenly Maharshi bids him turn his gaze down to the bottom of the hill. He obeys and is astonished to see that the Western hemisphere of the globe lay stretched out far below. It was crowded with millions of people; he could vaguely discern them as masses of forms, but the night's darkness still enshrouded them. Then says Maharshi:—

"When you go back there, you shall have this peace which you now feel. But its price will be that you shall henceforth cast aside the idea that you are this body or this brain. When this peace will flow into you, then you shall have to forget your own self, for you will have turned your life over to THAT!"

And Maharshi places one end of a thread of silver light in his hand.

He awoke from that extraordinarily vivid dream with the sense of its penetrating sublimity yet upon him.

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Later P. B. gets to his usual cold calculation and takes stock of the situation. He finds that the sage has *no wish to convert* any one to his own ideas, whatever they may be, and no desire to add a single person to his following, and his *amour propre* is a bit wounded by the fact. Yet ever since he had his dream he feels a great awe whenever he enters Maharshi's presence. These and some other ideas form conflicting currents within him—not yet harmonised to give him the unified and peaceful frame of mind which he was admiring in the sage and longed for in himself.

He still possesses a cynical, sceptical outlook unstirred by religious emotion, and wonders how Maharshi freed himself from all problems, so that no woe could touch him. As P. B. is still at war with himself, questions issue out, especially about the need for, or the evils of, an ascetic life.

P.B. :—The Yogis say that one must renounce this world and go into secluded jungles or mountains, if one wishes to find truth. Such things can hardly be done in the West ; our lives are so different. Do you agree with the Yogis ?

M. :—The life of action need not be renounced. If you meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea ; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities.

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P. B. :—What will be the result of doing that ?

M. :—As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord....

A man should surrender the personal selfishness which binds him to this world. Giving up the false self is true renunciation.

P. B. :—How is it possible to become selfless while leading a life of worldly activity ?

M. :—There is no conflict between work and wisdom.

P. B. :—Do you mean that one can continue all the old activities in one's profession, for instance, and at the same time get enlightenment ?

M. :—Why not ? But in that case one will not think that it is the old personality which is doing the work, because one's consciousness will gradually become transformed until it is entered in That which is beyond the little self.

P. B. :—If a person is engaged in work, there will be little time left for him to meditate.

M. :—Setting apart time for meditation is only for the merest spiritual novices. A man who is advancing will begin to enjoy the deeper beatitude, whether he is at work or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude.

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P. B. :—(Using the word Yoga to denote only ascetic practice). Then you do not teach the way of Yoga ?

M. :—The Yogi tries to drive his mind to the goal, as a cowherd drives a bull with a stick, but on this path the seeker coaxes the bull by holding out a handful of grass !

P. B. :—How is that done ?

M. :—You have to ask yourself the question, 'Who am I'? This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem and you will solve all other problems thereby.

Will it be clearer if it is put in this way ? All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one. But have you ever been struck by the fact that they love their own selves most ? Now relate that to the fact that they are ever desirous of attaining happiness through one means or another, through drink or through religion, and you are provided with a clue to the real nature of man. Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable ; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end.

P. B. :—But the world is so unhappy ?

M. :—Yes, but that is because the world is ignorant of its true self. All men, without exception, are consciously or unconsciously seeking for it. Even if they

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sin it is because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin which they commit. This striving is instinctive in man, but they do not know that they are really seeking their true selves, and so they try these wicked ways first as a means to attain a liberty.

P. B. :—What exactly is this self of which you speak? If what you say is true, then there must be another self in man.

M. :—Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves? To understand this matter it is first necessary for a man to analyse himself. Because it has long been his habit to think as others think, he has never faced his 'I' in the true manner. He has not a correct picture of himself; he has too long identified himself with the body and the brain. Therefore, I tell you to pursue this enquiry. 'Who am I'?

You ask me to describe this true self to you. What can be said? It is That out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises, and into which it shall have to disappear.

P. B. :—Disappear? How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?

M. :—The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primæval thought in the mind of every man, is the thought 'I.' It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun 'I' has arisen in the mind, that the second personal pronoun 'You' can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I' thread until it leads you

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back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so is it the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced.

P. B. :—You mean that it is perfectly possible to conduct such a mental investigation into oneself ?

M. :—Assuredly ; It is possible to go inwards until the last thought 'I' gradually vanishes.

P. B. :—What is then left ? Will a man then become quite unconscious, or will he become an idiot ?

M. :—Not so : on the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is immortal and he will become truly wise, when he has awakened to his true self, which is the real nature of man.

P. B. :—But surely the sense of 'I' must also pertain to that ?

M. :—The sense of 'I' pertains to the person, the body and brain. When a man knows his true self for the first time, something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind ; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it the soul, still others name it Nirvana, and Hindus call it Liberation ; you may give it what name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself ; rather has he found himself.

Unless and until a man embarks upon this quest of the true self doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps throughout life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others, when in their heart of hearts they know

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that they cannot rule themselves. Yet the greatest power is at the command of the man who has penetrated to his inmost depth. There are men of giant intellects who spend their lives gathering knowledge about many things. Ask these men if they have solved the mystery of man, if they have conquered themselves, and they will hang their heads in shame. What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are? Men avoid this enquiry into the true self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken?

P. B. :—That is so difficult, a superhuman task.

M. :—The difficulty is less real than you think.

The realization of truth is the same for both Indians and Europeans. Admittedly the way to it may be harder for those who are engrossed in worldly life, but even then one can and must conquer. The current induced during meditation can be kept up by habit, by practising to do so. Then one can perform his work and activities in that very current itself; there will be no break. Thus, too, there will be no difference between meditation and external activities. If you meditate on this question, 'Who am I?' —if you begin to perceive that neither the body nor the brain nor the desires are really you, then the *very attitude of enquiry* will eventually draw the answer to you out of the depths of your own being; it will come to you of its own accord as a deep realization.

Know the real self, and then the truth will shine forth within your heart like sunshine. The mind will become untroubled and real happiness will flood it, for happiness and the true self are identical. You will have no more doubts once you attain this self-awareness.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

A WESTERN DEVOTEE—*Contd.*

PAUL BRUNTON went away from Tiruvannamalai and enquired into the numerous supernatural and extraordinary things with which India abounds and which naturally interest a Westerner, *e.g.*, astrology, witchcraft, necromancy, phenomenal materialisation. He went also to the Radha Swami Cult centre at Dayalbagh, and to Nasik, the headquarters of the Parsi Messiah who had promised to endow him with thaumaturgic powers. Not satisfied with all these he came back to Tiruvannamalai to take up the position of a disciple of Maharshi and put his request briefly and bluntly. The reply was :—

M. :—What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple's standpoint. To the one who has realized the true self there is neither master nor disciple. Such a one regards all people within equal eye. You must find the master within you, within your own spiritual self. You must regard his body in the same way as he himself regards it; the body is not his true self.

This looked like a rebuff. Yet P. B. made the Ashram his abode for a time and waited. Then whatever he did he never failed to be aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiations which steadily per-

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colated into his brain. He enjoyed an ineffable tranquillity merely by sitting for a while in the neighbourhood of Maharshi. By careful observation and frequent analysis he arrived in time at the complete certitude that a reciprocal influence arose whenever he was near Maharshi. The thing was most subtle. But it was quite unmistakable.

Again he realised that all his questions moved in an endless game, the play of thoughts which possess no limit to their extent, that somewhere within him there was a well of certitude which could provide him with all the waters of truth he required, and that it would be better to cease his questioning and attempt to realize the tremendous potencies of his own spiritual nature. So he remained silent and waited, being perfectly aware of the sublime realisation being due to nothing else than a spreading ripple of telepathic radiation from this mysterious and imperturbable man. Yet, though the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak ; the former nature could not be killed at one stroke.

P. B. :—This path is full of difficulties and I am so conscious of my own weaknesses.

M. :—This is the surest way to handicap oneself, this burdening of one's mind with the fear of failure and thought of one's failings. That fear is not true. The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself.

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P. B. :—It is easy for you to attain and keep spiritual serenity in this jungle retreat, where there is nothing to disturb or distract you, but not for us in our busy town.

M. :—When the goal is reached, when you know the knower, there is no difference between living in a house in London and living in the solitude of a jungle.

P. B. found that Maharshi's way of helping others was by an unobstrusive, silent and steady outpouring of healing vibrations into troubled souls, a mysterious telepathic process for which science will one day be required to account. As to how P. B. himself was helped, it is best to allow him to tell it in his own exquisite style :—

"During those daily meditations in the potent neighbourhood of the sage, I have learnt how to carry my thoughts inward to an ever-deepening point. It is impossible to be in frequent contact with him without becoming lit up inwardly, as it were, mentally illumined by a sparkling ray from his spiritual orb. Again and again I become conscious that he is drawing my mind into his atmosphere during these periods of quiet repose. And it is at such times that one begins to understand why the silences of this man are more significant than his utterances. His quiet unhurried poise veils a dynamic attainment, which can powerfully affect a person without the medium of audible speech or visible action. There are moments when I feel this power of his so greatly that I know he has only to issue the most disturbing command and I will readily obey it. But the Maharshi is the last person in the world to place his followers in the chains of servile obedience, and allows every one the utmost

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freedom of action. In this respect he is quite refreshingly different from most of the teachers and Yogis I have met in India.

"My meditations take the line he had indicated during my first visit, when he had tantalized me by the vagueness which seemed to surround many of his answers. I have begun to look into my own self.

"The gist of his message is :—

"Pursue the enquiry 'Who am I?' relentlessly. Analyse your entire personality. Try to find out where the I-thought begins. Go on with your meditations. Keep turning your attention within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop, and it will eventually lead you to the goal.

"In the helpful proximity of the Maharshi, my meditations and self-soliloquies become increasingly less tiring and more effective. A strong expectancy and sense of being guided inspire my constantly repeated efforts. There are strange hours when I am clearly conscious of the unseen power of the sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality, with the result that I penetrate a little deeper still into the shrouded borderland of being which surrounds the human mind.

"But if, humanly speaking, he is well insulated against outside contacts, whoever discovers the requisite Ariadne's thread can walk the inner path leading to spiritual contact with him.

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"And I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, and an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him; because he makes no claims to occult powers and heirophantic knowledge to impress the mystery-loving nature of his countrymen; and because he is so totally without any traces of pretension that he strongly resists every effort to canonize him during his life-time.

"It seems to me further, that one must accept the fact that such a sage comes to reveal something to us, not to argue anything with us. At any rate his teachings make a strong appeal to me; for his personal attitude and practical method, when understood, are quite scientific in their way. He brings in no supernatural power and demands no blind religious faith.

"The sublime spirituality of Maharshi's atmosphere and the rational self-questioning of his philosophy find but a faint echo in yonder temple of Arunachala.

"Even the word 'God' is rarely on his lips.

"He simply puts forward a way of self-analysis, which can be practised irrespective of any ancient or modern theories and beliefs which one may hold, a way that will finally lead man to true self-understanding.

"I follow this process of self-divestment in the effort to arrive at pure integral being. Again and again I am aware that Maharshi's mind is imparting something to my own, though no words may be passing between us.

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"I return hastily from an exploration of some usually veiled sanctuaries of the great temple and enter the hall when the evening meditation period has run out half its life. I slip quietly to the floor and straightway assume my regular meditation posture. In a few seconds I compose myself and bring all wandering thoughts to a strong centre. An intense interiorization of consciousness comes with the closing of eyes.

"Maharshi's seated form floats in a vivid manner before my mind's eye. Following his frequently repeated instruction I endeavour to pierce through the mental picture into that which is formless, his real being and inner nature, his soul. To my surprise the effort meets with almost instantaneous success and the picture disappears again, leaving me with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of his intimate presence.

"The mental questionings which have marked most of my earlier meditations have lately begun to cease. I have repeatedly interrogated my consciousness of physical, emotional and mental sensations in turn, but, dissatisfied in the quest of self, have eventually left them all. I have then applied the attention of consciousness to its own centre, striving to become aware of its place of origin. Now comes the supreme moment. In that concentration of stillness, the mind withdrawn into itself, one's familiar world begins to fade off into shadowy vagueness. One is apparently environed for a while by sheer nothingness, having arrived at a kind of mental blank wall.

"To-night I flash swiftly to this point, with barely a skirmish against the continuous sequence of thoughts

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which usually play the prelude to its arrival. Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bear me inwards with resistless speed. The first great battle is over, almost without a stroke, and a pleasurable, happy, easeful feeling succeeds its high tension.

"In the next state I stand apart from the intellect, conscious that it is thinking, but warned by an intuitive voice that it is merely an instrument. I watch these thoughts with a weird detachment. The power to think, which has hitherto been a matter for merely ordinary pride, now becomes a thing from which to escape, for I perceive with startling clarity that I have been its unconscious captive. There follows the sudden desire to stand outside the intellect and just *be*. I want to dive into a place deeper than thought. I want to know what it will feel like to deliver myself from the constant bondage of the brain, but to do so with all my attention awake and alert.

"Feeling that I have found the birthplace of thinking, I drop the powerfully positive attitude which has brought my attention to this point and surrender myself to complete passivity, yet still keeping as intently watchful as a snake of its prey.

"The waves of thought naturally begin to diminish. The workings of logical rational sense drop towards zero point. The strongest sensation I have experienced till now grips me. Time seems to reel dizzily as the antennæ of my rapidly growing intuition begin to reach out into the unknown. The reports of my bodily senses are no longer

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heard, felt, remembered. I know that at any moment I shall be standing outside things, on the very edge of the world's secret. . . . .

"Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts. I perceive, what I have suspected for some time and what Maharshi has confidently affirmed, that the mind takes its rise in a transcendental source. The brain has passed into a state of complete suspension, as it does in deep sleep, yet there is not the slightest loss of consciousness. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed radiant self. For, something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which *was* I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and *becomes* me. With it arrives an amazing new sense of absolute freedom, for thought is like a loom-shuttle which is always going to and fro, and to be freed from its tyrannical motion is to step out of prison into the open air.

"I find myself outside the rim of world-consciousness. The planet, which has so far harboured me, disappears. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. The latter, I feel rather than think, is the primæval stuff out of which worlds are created, the first state of matter. It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly alive.

"I touch, as in a flash, the meaning of this mysterious universal drama which is being enacted in space and then

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return to the primal point of my being. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday's bitter memories and to-morrow's anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity. My arms embrace all creatain with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

"Maharshi's eyes glow like twin stars through the half-darkness. I remind myself that never have I met in any man eyes as remarkable as those of this last descendant of India's Rishis. In so far as the human eyes can mirror divine power, it is a fact that the sage's do that.

"We now understand each other better without words, for in this profound silence our minds approach a beautiful harmony, and in this optic telegraphy I receive a clear unuttered message. Now that I have caught a wonderful and memorable glimpse of Maharshi's viewpoint on life, my own inner life has begun to mingle with his."

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EPILOGUE

BY

S. S. COHEN

THE fourteen years which intervened between the laying down of Sri B. V. Narasimha Swami's pen after writing the foregoing Life of Sri Ramana Maharshi and the passing of the Master into Mahanirvana in 1950, saw great expansion in the Ashram's activities and its fame. As Sri Bhagavan's teaching spread far and wide and captivated the hearts and imaginations of seekers, both in the East and the West, devotees and truth-hungry visitors poured into the Ashram from many lands and climes in an increasingly-swelling stream, which necessitated its corresponding physical extension to accommodate and feed them all. Thus by 1938 solid buildings of granite stones and mortar sprang up in many parts of the Ashram premises. The Office which had hitherto been alternated with the dining shift in the tiny room which served both purposes, was then established in its own permanent building. The dining hall became an imposing structure capable of accommodating 500 to 700 diners at a time, with an adjoining equally commodious kitchen. The ramshackle cowshed became a huge *goshala* (cow-house) in the North-easternmost corner of the compound. The bookshop and Veda School each had by then its own building. A few small terraced rooms were made available for temporary visitors who came from long distances. The visitors from South India who

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were by far the largest in number were accommodated in large dormitory-like guest rooms.

A new feature which in the beginning caused some headache to the management and which was later satisfactorily met, was the influx of permanent settlers, particularly from the West, who applied for permanent lodgings or sites for cottages. The Ashram ground is too restricted to permit the building of a large number of cottages for individual settlers, who are used to spread themselves in more than one room with separate kitchen and bathroom. After permitting the first Westerner to build his own cottage, the pinch began to be felt when a flood of demands for sites followed. The prospect frightened the authorities, and made them put down their foot and reject them all.

By 1941 the overflow became so intense that the devotees, who till then had scattered themselves as best they could : some in the town and some on the hill or in a neighbouring forest-like garden known by the name of Palakottu, acquired many acres of land near the Ashram which they divided among themselves in plots, on which they built their small houses. In the space of five years, this grew into a new township entirely independent of, and free from, the Ashram authority or management. In it lived many sadhakas, some singly and some with their families. This colony is now known by the name of Ramananagar, after the name of Sri Bhagavan, and has its own Post Office.

The only place which till 1946 remained unaltered was the old tiled-roofed *darsan* Hall in which the Master lived, slept and received the streams of visitors. It was

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always full to capacity: those who could not squeeze themselves in it, were satisfied to sit on the outside verandah and meditate there, or listen through the doors and windows to any talks taking place inside. In 1946 when the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Master's arrival at Tiruvannamalai attracted a vast congregation from all parts of the world, a temporary shed covered with palm leaves and open on three sides to the North of the Hall was made available. It came to be known as the Jubilee Hall. This, however, served as the darsan Hall till 1949, when the large stone-built Hall attached to the Mother's temple was completed and inaugurated.

DISCIPLES

In the body of this book the names of some disciples have been mentioned in brief sketches to illustrate the individual appeal the Master had for each of them. But those were by no means the only ones who had stories worth telling. Actually each devotee had his or her interesting story peculiar to his or her circumstance.

As the tide of devotees rose to considerable proportions after 1935, an attempt to single out any one of them for this record would be highly misleading if not also invidious. For now the foreigners came in appreciable numbers, and there has hardly been any civilized country which has not been represented at one time or another by a visitor. Even at this hour a few of them still remain tied to the place, which they find to be one of the sanest in this crazy world, and where the sacred remains of their Divine Guru continue to scintillate with spiritual power and peace. Almost all of them own the houses in which they live.

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BOOKS

Since 1936, new books, some translated from the vernacular original and some directly written in English, embodying the recorded talks of the Master were published by the Ashram. After the Mahanirvana a spate of them came into existence; all written by old devotees from reminiscences, diaries, or recorded conversations. A list of the English publications is appended to this book.

MOTHER'S SAMADHI

Reference has been made to the death of Sri Maharishi's Mother in 1922 and to her burial near Palitheertham which caused the Ashram to shift from the hill to the burial place, round which it grew and spread. Sri Niranjananandaswami, the younger brother of the Master, who later became its Sarvadhikari, proved to be a most devoted son. Not satisfied with the simple structure over his mother's samadhi, he vowed to erect a lasting monument in the form of a temple in its place, to perpetuate her memory as the mother of one of the mightiest Rishis that had ever lived. He made his plans in 1938 and immediately set to work with unremitting determination and courage. From the donations of devotees he saved every extra rupee with which he slowly collected the stones, and all the other materials which went in its making. The grim attention which he gave to the perfection of this monument may literally be said to have cost him his heart's blood. Eleven years of incessant watch and labour were at last crowned with success, when the magnificent structure was completed in the beginning of 1949, and the consecration ceremony (Kumbabhishekam) was performed in the presence of Bhagavan and with his undoubted blessing, in grand Vedic style for

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five full days from the 14th to 18th March. This was attended by not less than 15,000 people from the neighbourhood of Tiruvannamalai and the whole of India. From that date onwards the daily worship has been performed in this shrine, now known as Mathrubootheswara Temple.

The death anniversary of the Mother has been for long annually celebrated in the Ashram, as the Mahapuja day. This falls in May or June according to the Hindu Calendar in each particular year.

MASTER'S ILLNESS AND MAHANIRVANA

Adjoining Mathrubhootheswara temple a large Hall was constructed with the same materials as the temple itself, namely, granite stones and mortar, to be the permanent darsan Hall. In it a large couch cut out of a single rock, and beautifully polished, carved and designed, was placed for the Master, to serve as a seat by day and a bed by night. This Hall was declared open in a simple ceremony on the 1st June 1949, from which date it became the new darsan Hall.

But alas! From this time the Master's health began to give way. He had entered his 70th year, and the chronic complaints which he had acquired during the early years of his absorption in the Ultimate Consciousness, owing to the entire neglect of his body, began to tell on him. Due to exposure to cold, rain, wind and the dampness of the underground cave (Pathala Lingam), in various open spaces, and on the hill, he had contracted asthma, and then an arthritic rheumatism which clung to him till the end. Signs of pronounced weakness appeared in 1947, which exposed his system to the invasion

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of latent or new diseases. The rheumatism itself increased in violence, and spells of nervous hiccup of long duration further weakened him and paved the way to a virulent sarcomatous growth on his left elbow, to which his body finally succumbed, after a severe illness lasting more than a year.

The year 1949/50 was a year of great bodily suffering for the Master. Although he never complained but bore all the pain, surgical operations and radium applications, with the cheerful calmness becoming the Divine Man he was, yet the disciples were under no illusion of the havoc which the corrosive poison of this malignant tumour created inside his delicately sensitive constitution. It started in November, 1948 as a tiny lump of the size of a pea on the ulnar nerve of his left elbow, which the Ashram doctor assisted by another devotee doctor thought fit to remove at its very infancy, on the 9th of February, 1949. But alas! they counted without the tumour. The wound soon gave rise to another growth, which one day the Master jocularly characterised as "rising like a lingam". Another operation had thus to be performed on the 27th March, this time by an eminent surgeon, who thought he had removed enough to prevent recurrence. Yet again the wound refused to heal. Radium was applied later, and under its action the wound showed favourable signs and the Master's health considerably improved, though this improvement proved short-lived; for by the 20th June, an itching sensation in the elbow heralded the re-appearance of the lump, from which blood now oozed. After a month of herbal treatment, septic symptoms appeared in July which called for penicillin injections. The doctors held that complete cure was possible

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only through amputation of the whole left arm from the shoulder, but this the Master strictly forbade. Thus a much more elaborate operation had to be performed in the Ashram dispensary on the 7th August and then a fourth one on the 19th December with anaesthetic, diothermic knife, blood-transfusion and all such surgical paraphernalia with the hope of blasting the dread disease from its very foundations as the only alternative to amputation. But Fate proved stronger than the doctors' skill. The fourth and last operation so depleted the Master's vitality that further resort to surgery became out of the question. Other systems of medicine were then tried one by one; Homeopathy, Malabari Vaidya and the Siddha system, but all proved fruitless and were stopped at the end of March, when all hope was given up. With a blood pressure as low as 68/36, Sri Bhagavan continued to live from hour to hour. The vast congregation of devotees who assembled during the first fortnight of April were amazed at the peaceful repose of his countenance, the lustre of his eyes and the keen alertness of his mind. Not a complaint, not a moan, not a sigh escaped him throughout this terrible ordeal.

When he left the dispensary on the 1st January 1950, the Master did not return to the big darsan Hall, but went to the small room which he had used as a bedroom during the previous few months. From there he dragged himself twice a day to the couch just outside the room to sit for about an hour morning and evening among his disciples who looked forward to his appearance and who waited expectantly outside. But when on the 28th March he found himself incapable of making even these few steps, he ceased, though he insisted that devotees

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should be given the chance of seeing him twice a day, and this they continued to do, filing past his door in queues till the very last evening on April the 14th.

Details of the Master's illness have already been published in my book "Guru Ramana", from which I quote the events of this last day and the following two days for the convenience of those readers who have not read it.

"14th April, 1950 :— Maharishi is in a very precarious condition. The whole morning has been spent by devotees in hushed gloom and abated breaths. After the evening darshan which was attended by more than fifteen hundred persons, the unanimous verdict was that it was positively the last. The Master is now propped on large pillows, almost in a sitting posture to enable him to breathe freely. At 7 p.m. oxygen is administered to him for a few minutes, but, seeing it gave him no relief, he feebly asked that it should be stopped. The situation was tense : about five hundred devotees were outside in sad expectation of the solemn last moment. Blood relations, Ashram workers, and a few veteran disciples went in by turn to have a last sight of him. When the end was known to be approaching the whole congregation with one voice took to chanting the Tamil hymns he had composed in praise of Lord Arunachala : "Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala Shiva, Arunachala!", till it came at 8-47. Many devotees grief stricken and beating their breasts with agony, rushed to the big darshan Hall, to which the sacred body had been brought and made to sit crossed legs in *yoga asana*, to pay their last respects. The

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news spread like wild fire to the town and the neighbouring villages and drew huge crowds. By 9-15 the crowd was so thick, that it became necessary to give chance to all to pay their homage, and pass the body in an orderly manner. A queue was thus formed seven to ten thick at a quick-march pace.

"Around the sofa sat the disciples, some chanting Maharishi's verses and other devotional hymns, and some silently. Sandal-wood paste, and jasmin flowers now cover the body, and incense burns by its side.

"At about 9 p.m., Monsier Cartier-Brassen, the famous French photographer, related an experience of his to me. He said: 'It is a most astonishing experience: I was in the open space in front of my house, when my friends drew my attention to the sky, where I saw a vividly-luminous shooting-star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting-star I had before seen, coming from the South, and moving slowly across the sky, reached the top of Arunachala and disappeared behind it. Because of its singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches—it was 8-47. We raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition was too sadly true: the Master had passed into Mahanirvana at that very minute.' Other devotees in the Ashram and in the town later told me that they too had seen the prophetic meteor.

"15th April:— Many devotees kept vigil the whole of last night, singing and chanting the Veda, as did the queues of worshippers, till 11-30 a.m. today, when the body was taken out to the south Verandah for *puja* and *abishekam*. Sri T. N. Venkataraman

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in the immediate presence and under the supervision of Sri Niranjanananda Swamy, the *sarvadhikari*, with his own hands poured over the sacred head dozens of brass pots of milk, curds, butter-milk, orange juice, mashed bananas and jack fruits, cocoa-nut water, etc., which he followed by many bottles of rose-water, attar, perfumes of all kinds and sweet-smelling oils. Then enormous flower garlands, and piles of jasmin flowers were placed round the neck and strewn all over the body.

"At 6-30 p.m., the body which by then had received the homage of not less than about 40,000 persons was carried in a decorated palanquin, reserved for the God of the temple, to the samadhi. Here it was placed in the same *yoga-asana* posture into a bag made of the finest *kaddar* (home-spun cloth), which was then filled with pure camphor, and lowered into the area in the pit which had been reserved for it. Then the pit was filled to the brim with camphor, salt, and sacred ashes to preserve the body from worms and rapid disintegration, and closed with masonry work.

"Mr. Kakobad, a Parsi devotee of the Master of long-standing, last night happened to be on the terrace of his house in Madras (120 miles away) when he saw the shooting-star to which Mr. Cartier-Brasson and others referred last night, and intuitively associated it with the Mahanirvana of the Master and, without waiting for the morning, he immediately hired a car and came at top speed.

"16th April :— All the English and Tamil papers which arrived this morning from Madras gave wide

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publicity in banner headlines to the passing away of the Maharishi. They also referred to the meteor seen in the sky all over the State of Madras, scores of thousands of square miles, at 8-47 on the night of April 14, by a large number of people in different places and reported to the Press by many eye-witnesses who had been struck by its peculiar look and behaviour, which led them to ascribe the strange phenomenon to the passing of a great soul. Such a mass of evidence speaks for itself, if evidence need be."

The burial of the sacred remains was made almost in the identical spot, where till 1938 the Master used to take his meals: the small dining-hall-cum-office having by then ceased to exist, except as a place of worship in lieu of the Mother's Samadhi during the transformation of the latter into the present picturesque temple. Thus what was once the dining hall became in 1950 the heart of the Ashram, the Master's samadhi, in which *abishekam, puja* and *naivedyam* are performed twice a day, with the *parayanam* (Veda recital), which used to be read near the Master's seat during his life-time. Resident devotees and visitors usually attend these devotional functions, particularly in the evening. They sit reverently listening to the melodious chanting, or meditate in the purifying proximity of the holy samadhi, where the Master's spiritual magnetisms are strongly felt.

SRI NIRANJANANANDA SWAMIGAL

The reader is already familiar with this name. To refresh his memory I shall briefly recapitulate what has already been recorded elsewhere. Sri Niranjanananda Swami, or simply Chinnaswami, was the younger brother

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Sri Bhagavan—Ten days before Mahanirvana.

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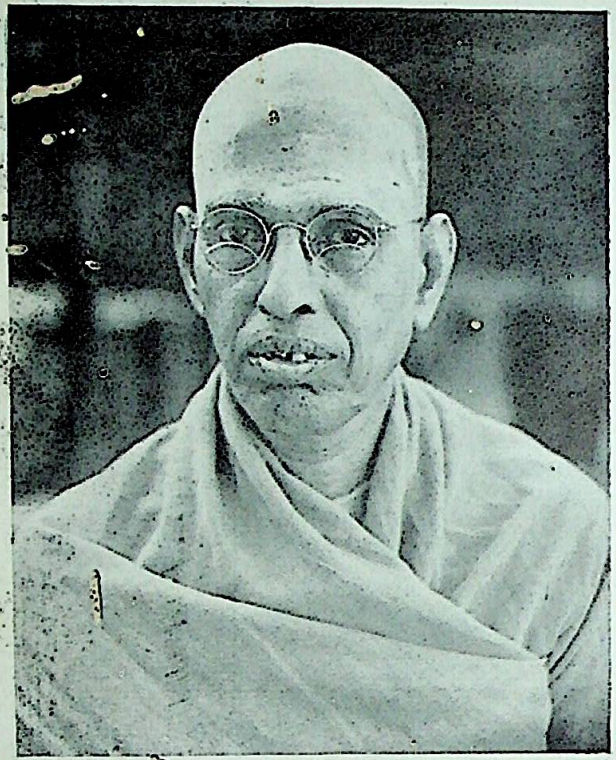
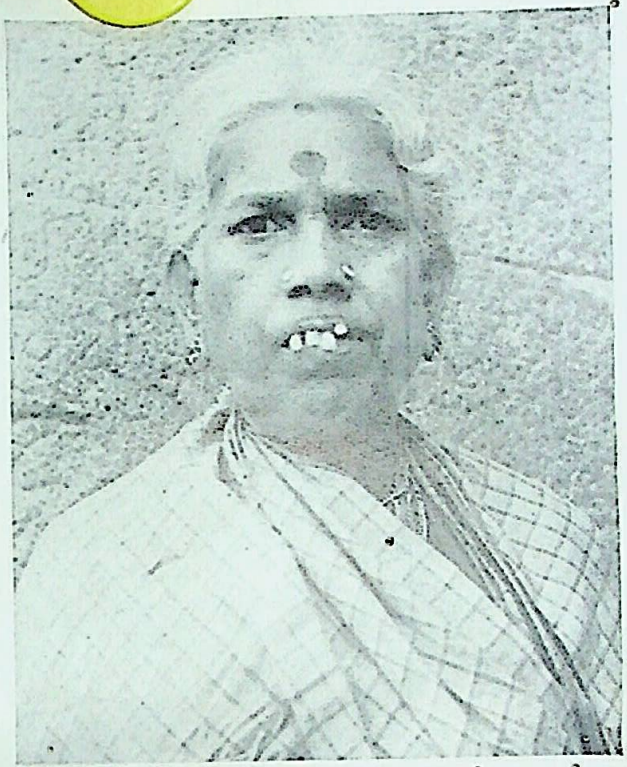


Sri Niranjanananda Swami.



ALAMELU AMMAL
(Bhagavan's Sister)

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of Sri Maharishi and the last but one child of his parents. Born in 1885, he joined the Master's Ashram at Tiruvannamalai in 1917, when as a widower he took the vows of *sanyasa* with the view of dedicating his life entirely to the service of Sri Bhagavan. In 1930 he was made the *sarvadhikari* (manager or superintendent) of the Ashram to manage its temporal affairs. Since then and till his death, which took place very early in 1953, he worked tirelessly and with exemplary devotion for the welfare of the Ashram and the perpetuation of his mother's memory, which was the most sacred treasure of his heart. The present Ashram and all it contains, owe their existence entirely to his labour, iron determination and thrift. How thrifty was he in the Ashram's interest will be judged from the last message he gave from his deathbed to his successors, to which I shall refer in due course. Apart from the expansion inside the Ashram to which mention has been made, Chinnaswami bought in the name of the Ashram, the birthplace of Sri Maharishi in Tiruchuzhi, and converted it into a temple under the name "Sundaram Mandir". He also acquired the house in Madura where the Master had his first experience of the Absolute Awareness and from which he left for Tiruvannamalai in 1896. That house too became a temple named "Sri Ramana Mandiram". In both these shrines *puja* and *naivedyam* are being daily performed.

The passing of the Master into Mahanirvana affected Chinnaswami deeply. It was for the moment as if the sun had set for him and left him in utter darkness and solitude, particularly as some petty-minded workers raised their heads against his authority and took to nag-

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ging and worrying him. He soon developed a heart disease and, seeing that his work was done and well done too, he decided to give to his tired and aged body the long rest due to it. So in June 1950 he called a conference of the most prominent devotees and, choosing the ablest who were willing to serve from among them, he formed them into a committee under the title of Sri Ramanashram Managing Committee, to which he entrusted the main task of carrying on the Ashram activities under his own Chairmanship.

Although his heart ached at the departure of his beloved brother and Master, and the truculence of some workers, he never ceased to feel the mighty powers of Sri Bhagavan behind him till the end. The spiritual Sun that had sustained him in his difficulties in the long years of his services during the life-time of the Master, continued to shine in his inner life to inspire and guide him. Now it suffused him with unbounded peace. But the heart disease continued to make incursions on his vitality, so much so that the last six months of 1952, it kept him in bed, heroically bearing his severe illness. The end approached slowly, so that the work of purification through physical suffering might be completed. Though his chest struggled for breath and his water-logged limbs for relief from the heavy load that weighted them down, his mind remained centred on Bhagavan, whose photographs decorated the four walls of his small room in the Ashram clinic. Feeling that his end was near, on the 28th January 1953, he called T. N. Venkataraman who is his son and successor to the Ashram's seat, his family and some Ashram workers and devotees, and with thick speech, said :—

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"I am departing with a clear conscience and clean hands. I have not used even a pie of the Ashram funds for my own benefit. Everything here belongs to Bhagavan, and should be guarded with care and vigilence. Devote yourselves heart and soul to the service of the Lord, and in return He will shower His grace on you. Be sincere and truthful to the core of your being. Uphold our revered ancient tradition in the working of this Ashram, as I have upheld them all my life."

At 11-30 p.m. on Thursday the 29th January, at almost the exact hour of the very holy full-moon of Makaram, Sri Niranjanananda Swamigal peacefully passed into Mahasamadhi amidst loud chanting of the sacred Veda by dozens of the Ashram devotees. His remains were buried in the quiet coconut grove, which he himself had planted and which was dear to him, in a straight line facing those of the mother, whom throughout life he had adored. Although not of his choice, this site must have conceivably given a great satisfaction to his spirit.

With him passed away the last living child of Sundaram and Alagammal.

His son T. N. Venkataraman was installed as the Manager of the Ashram and the Life-President of Sri Ramanashram Managing Committee, on the 1st February, 1953.

"ATHAI"

This biography will not be complete without a brief reference to the Master's sister, Alamelu Ammal, who was the last child and only daughter of her parents. It will

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be recalled that Chinnaswami as Nagasundaram became a widower very early in life, and that his baby son was given first to the care of his aunt, and then at the latter's death, which was not many years afterwards, to that of his sister Alamelu Ammal, the aunt of the baby, who naturally grew to call her "Athai" (aunt), which name stuck to her ever since, and by which she has been endearingly called by her relations and friends.

Born in 1888, Athai grew to be one of those rare souls unique in their crystal purity and in their silent resignation to all conditions of life, coming as, they think, they do from the Lord Himself. Life itself, she considered to be a gift from Him, solely designed for His service. Having no child of their own, she and her husband Pichu Iyer, gratefully accepted the charge of the child Venkataraman, and brought him up with all the tenderness and love of fond parents, and when Venkataraman grew up to a fine manhood, married and begot children, they looked after the children with the same tenderness as they had looked after him.

When in 1938 Chinnaswami badly needed an assistant, he called Venkataraman, then a bright young man of 24, to help him in the management of the Ashram. With Venkataraman came his wife and two baby sons, followed after two or three years by Pichu Iyer and Athai. As no ladies were allowed to stay in the Ashram proper, a house in town was rented for the whole family, till a plot of ground was bought by Pichu Iyer in Ramananagar near the Ashram, and a house constructed on it for them.

But Athai was destined to die in the same month as her elder brother, Chinnaswami. Like him she spent the

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last six months of 1952 in bed, laid low by a virulent liver disease from which it pleased God to relieve her on Saturday, the 3rd January 1953, at 8-20 a.m. when she peacefully passed to Life Eternal to the care of her Divine brother Sri Ramana Bhagavan.

But though this book is finished and the Maharishi, his brother and sister have left the scene, the Ashram still continues as a place in whose sanctity the same peace is still to be found. Pilgrims and old devotees come, sit in front of the Holy Samadhi, close their eyes and find that they are once again in the very real presence of the beloved Guru, who meant everything to them and whom for a weak moment they feared they had lost. Surprise is followed by a look of joy and, rising from their place they go on their way convinced that RAMANA LIVES.

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APPENDIX

A strange and remarkable incident in the life of Sri Maharshi

One morning about the year 1912 the Swami, Palaniswamy, Vasudeva Sastri and others left the Virupaksha cave and proceeded together to Pachaiamman Koil taking oil and soap-nut powder for an oil-bath, as facilities for such a bath were ample at that place. Bath over, they started back, cutting a path for themselves across the hill. The bath and the walk were overstraining the Swami's nerves. The sun was fairly hot (about 10 A.M.) and the climbing was an additional strain. Palaniswamy and Sastri had gone some steps in advance. While the Swami was near (ஆமைப்பாறை) Tortoise Rock, he began to feel faint and what followed is best given in Swami's own words.

"Suddenly the view of natural scenery in front of me disappeared and a bright white curtain was drawn across the line of my vision and shut out the view of nature. I could distinctly see the gradual process. At one stage I could see a part of the prospect of nature yet clear, and the rest was being covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in the stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When it cleared, I walked on. When darkness and faintness overtook me a second time, I leaned against a rock until it cleared. And again for the third time I felt it safest to sit, so I sat near the rock. Then the bright white curtain had completely shut out my vision, my head was swimming, and my blood circu-

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lation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death-like hue—and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva Sastri took me in fact to be dead, held me in his embrace and began to weep aloud and lament my death. His body was shivering. I could at that time distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering, hear his lamentation and understand the meaning. I also *saw* the discoloration of my skin and I felt the stoppage of my heart beat and respiration, and the increased chillness of the extremities of my body. Yet my usual current of (Dhyana) "thought" * was continuing as usual in that state also. I was not afraid in the least, nor felt any sadness at the condition of my body. I had closed my eyes as soon as I sat near the rock in my usual posture but was not leaning against it. The body which had no circulation nor respiration, maintained that position still. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body, circulation revived with enormous force, as also respiration; and there was perspiration all over the body at every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes, got up and said "Let us go." We reached Virupaksha cave without further trouble. That was the only occasion on which both my blood circulation and respiration stopped."

Maharshi added, to correct some wrong accounts that had obtained currency about the incident, "I did not bring on the fit purposely, nor did I wish to see what this body would look like at death. Nor did I say that I will not leave this body without warning others. It was one of those fits that I used to get occasionally. Only it assumed a very serious aspect in this instance."

* Sahajasamadhi or perennial Self-realisation.

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Translation of the Sanskrit verses at pp. 90-91

1. A Rishi is one who abstains from sexual intercourse, is continent in food, self-controlled, able to bestow favours or curses on others, and truthful.

2. They are called Rishis whose sins have been washed away by penance, who speak the absolute truth and who understand the real import of the Vedas and their angas.

3. Who are always in penance and in purity, whose words are significant of the Reality only, and who are very learned.

4. Bhaga signifies the group of qualities consisting of:—(1) all-round power, (2) dharma, (3) fame, (4) prosperity, (5) real knowledge, and (6) dispassion.

Tamil verses referred to in page 125

அலையா வருபிறவி யத்தனையு மாற்ற
மலையா யெழுந்த மருந்தே - தலைவாநின்
ருள்கதியாய் வாழுமென் ருய்தாப மாற்றியே
யாள்வதவு முன்கடனே யாம். (க)

காலகா லாவுன் கமல பதஞ்சார்ந்த
பால னெனையீன்ரு ளாலந்தக் - காலன்ரூன்
வாரா வகையுன்கால் வாரிசமே காட்டுவா
யாராயிற் காலனுமே யார்? (உ)

ஞாலுங்கி யாயோங்கு கல்லருண வோங்கலே!
நூலுங்கி யாலன்னே கல்லுடலே - ஞாலுங்க
மாகச்செய் தன்பதத்தி லேக்கியமாக் கிக்கொள்வாய்
சாகத்தீ மூட்டுவதேன் சாற்று. (ங)

மாயா மயக்கமதை மாற்றருண மாமலையென்
ருயார் மயக்கதற்ற தாமதமேன் - ருயாகித்
தன்னையடைந் தார்வினையின் ருக்கறுத்தாள் வாருலகி
லன்னையா லண்டோ வுரை! (ச)

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